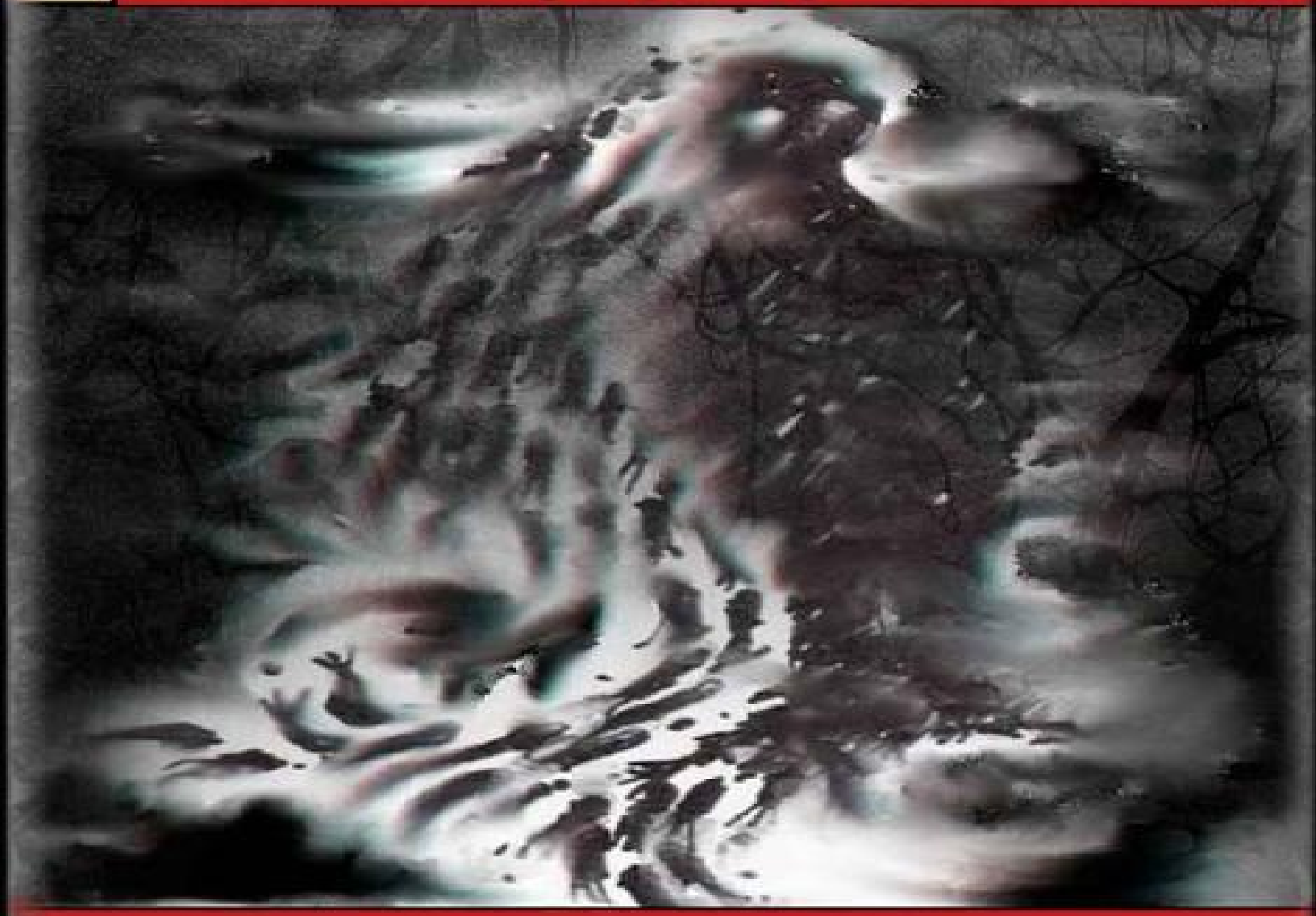
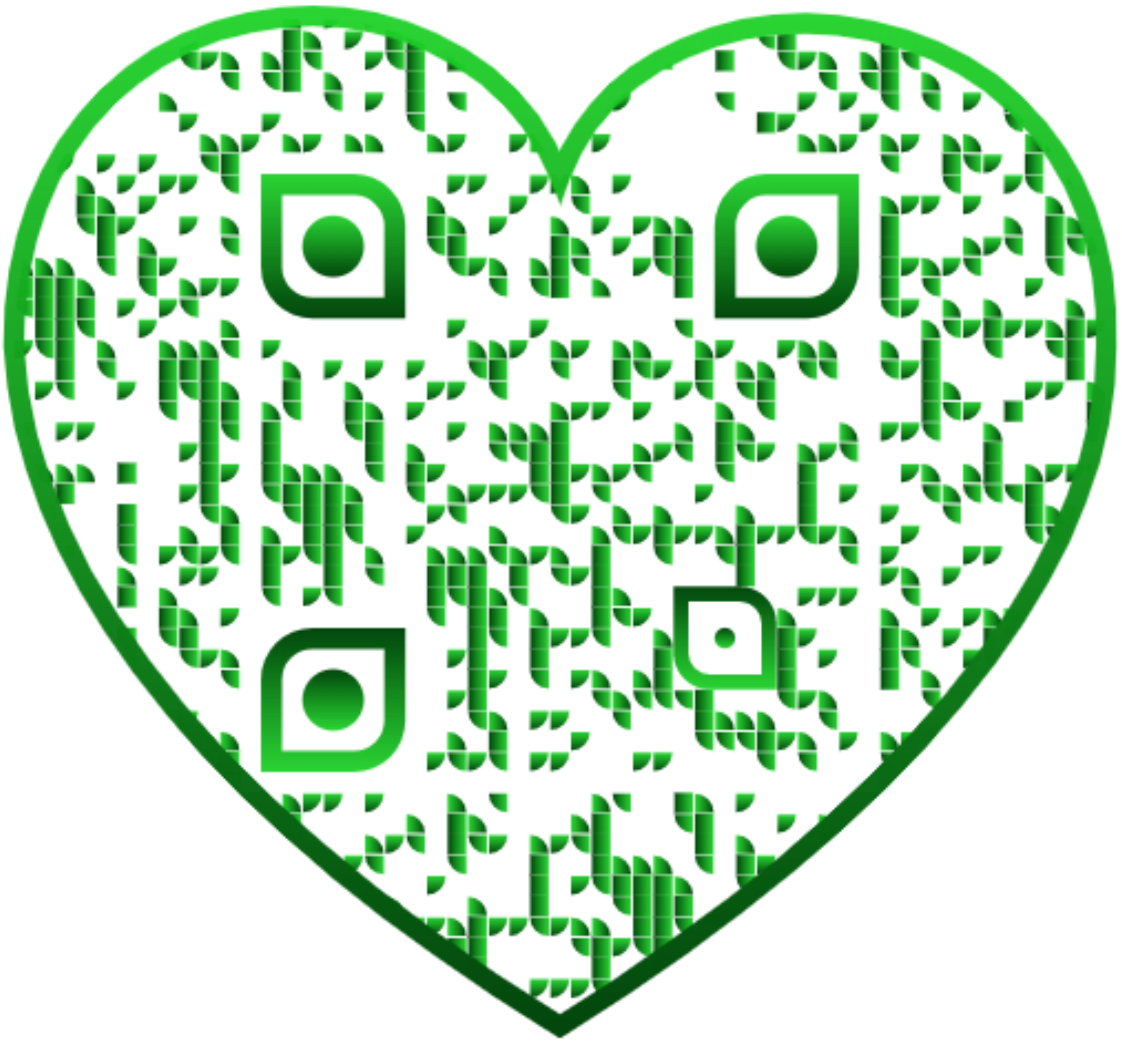
TRUE STORIES

RYAN SKINNER

TALES OF THE SKINWALKER



A COLLECTION OF STORIES FROM SKINWALKER RANCH AND BEYOND



TALES
OF THE
SKINWALKER

A
COLLECTION OF STORIES
FROM
SKINWALKER RANCH
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CADAVER DUST
MARK OF THE SKINWALKER
POWER OVER THE MIND
UNWELCOMED VISITOR
LONG BLACK HAIR
COYOTE ENCOUNTER
A FIRST ENCOUNTER
THE SKINWALKER'S GAME
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NAME NOT THE SKINWALKER
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SKIN AND BONES

SKINWALKER LORE

BAD MEDICINE

A SKINWALKER LEGEND

WIND IN THE TREES

SKINWALKER LORE

CURSE

LORE

A UFO RANCH TALE (SKINWALKER RANCH)

COINS

INTRODUCTION

I first became acquainted with Skinwalker lore when I had my first up close and personal encounter with unknown entities on I-70 in Utah, and just south of the infamous Skinwalker Ranch. I have since detailed these encounters and others to follow in my two previous books, Skinwalker Ranch, The Path of the Skinwalker and Skinwalker Ranch: No Trespassing. While these encounters were definitely not limited to the Skinwalker, I nevertheless found myself extremely fascinated by its origins, and then equally so by its evolution.

For those less familiar, the Skinwalker has been, from the sense of the petroglyphs and petro-graphs adorning the canyon rock all through the Great Basin area and the lands that make up the Four Corners, part of the native culture since people walked upright. In its earliest incarnation, however, it was perceived as a spirit or entity existing on another plane or within some alternate dimension and only crossing over to the mortal world of its own volition. That perception changed in the early part of the 19th century.

In 1864, what remained of the Navajo nation was forced into exile by the United States Army, resulting in what has become known as the Long Walk. Prior to the Long Walk, however, the US soldiers were less than successful in curtailing Navajo activity. To assist in their efforts, they made a deal with the Ute, encouraging them to conduct raids on the Navajo settlements, offering to pay for any stolen livestock and allowing the Ute to keep and sell as slaves any Navajo people taken prisoner.

In response, the Navajo medicine men took revenge by calling upon powerful spirits from beyond, who then sent forth the Skinwalker. From that point on, Ute history is filled with references to its dark deeds, spiritual torment, and, to the very day, foreboding presence among them and throughout the Four Corners.

The short tales to follow are modern day first and third-person encounters with the Skinwalker—mainly in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, who in its contemporary incarnation takes on the persona of a Native bogeyman scaring children, bedeviling teens, and exacting revenge upon those who have done it wrong.

The source of these stories are real people, most of whom shared

their encounters or experiences with me through my website—Skinwalker ranch.org.—and some of whom I later met in person as I travel throughout the United States, and—as is the case with these stories—primarily the southwest.

CADAVER DUST

Cadaver dust is ground from human bones. The most effective form is said to be derived from the bones of an infant, and even better if from a relative of the Skinwalker. It is blown into the face of the intended victim by the Skinwalker, and generally from the palm of his hand. Reed, too, may be used, sort of like a blowing-straw. The dust, once inhaled, incapacitates the victim, turning him or her into a zombie which can then be controlled by the Skinwalker using telepathic suggestion. Some believe the dust can also have a hallucinogenic effect, may paralyze the victim, and may even kill in extreme situations. Otherwise, the effect is short-term and wears off after a period.

This event happened just south of Polaca, Arizona, within the Navajo Reservation. A pair of Skinwalkers—supposedly an old couple that lived deep back in the reservation—were seen lurking around this small cattle ranch. Two heifers had disappeared recently; one of which was discovered down by the creek and mutilated. The man who owned the ranch, his two sons, and his brother armed themselves and went out to try to run them off.

One of the sons, not yet 18 years of age, was searching out beyond the barn when a dark shape, seemingly materializing from the darkness itself, loomed up in front of him almost nose to nose. As the boy attempted to raise his rifle, the figure raised its hands up to its face as if it was going to yell something. The boy, trying not to look it in the eyes, then felt something rush into his face, like dust or sand. Although he tried not to, he breathed some of it in and almost immediately things went dark and he started experiencing hallucinations and sensory deprivation.

The others found him only minutes later, on his knees, holding the sides of his head, and his eyes rolled back. He fell to the ground and went into some sort of trance, his body limp and he unresponsive. They carried him back to the house and summoned the local medicine man, who came and said some prayers over him. But, he told the others, there was nothing to be done but to wait for the cadaver dust, traces of which were still on his face and his shirt, to wear-off. He promised he'd come back the next day when the sun was up and bless the Hogan.

Later, after he had regained consciousness, the boy swore to the others that he was the victim of a dog-faced creature. He described it as not

quite as tall as he is, thin and scraggly with patches of mangy and dark hair, a canine snout, only shorter than a dog's, and with the smell of rotten eggs or worse. He said he doesn't recall anything more before passing out, other than suddenly not being able to breathe and having no control over his own body.

MARK OF THE SKINWALKER

Skinwalker lore suggests that the Skinwalker can move by means supernatural and undetected. Making eye contact with a Skinwalker gives him control over his victim, again by means of telepathic suggestion or some similar art. Often, encounters are limited to disconcerting victims simply by the Skinwalker making his presence known—a vague or unexplainable sense of dread—or allowing himself to be seen. Accepted lore provides that the Skinwalker is not vulnerable to traditional weapons, such as guns or blades, especially when wielded by white men.

This encounter takes place in Chinle, Arizona at our house. The five of us—a school friend, two cousins, my sister and I—were all in high school at the time. We were hanging out and everyone decided to spend the night. Because it was the middle of the summer and so hot, we set up our folks' van and my older brother's pickup truck so we could sleep outside where there was at least a bit of a breeze. We spent most of the earlier part of the night doing what teenagers do, including a little smoke—if you know what I mean—and some beers. Sometime after midnight, the three girls decided to call it a night and climbed into the bed of the pickup truck. My friend and I stayed out on the porch for another or hour or so before heading to the van. We must have dozed off soon afterwards.

According to my sister—she's a year younger than me—she is still awake, just lying there and looking up at the stars. The sky out here is really clear at night; there are stars everywhere. Suddenly the neighbor's dogs from across the dry bed start to bark, which around here usually means the local wild life is on the prowl. My sister says she is listening between the yips of the dogs to see if she can hear what's out there. Black against black, she suddenly sees this figure, as if out of nowhere, crouched on the roof of the pickup and staring down at her. She's absolutely frozen, partially out of fear and partially through no will of her own. She wants to scream or at least say something, but she can't find her voice; it's as if she's gasping for air, but

without making any noise and as if her lungs just won't fill.

Just then, our younger cousin wakes up—she says because out of nowhere she gets this feeling of intense dread. She sits up kind of suddenly, and at the same time it is like my sister is released from a spell. The air rushes into her lungs and she lets out a scream, pointing to the top of the truck. But whatever it was is now gone.

All three girls are now wide awake and panicking. They jump out of the back of the pickup and make for the house where my parents are sound asleep. My friend and I, totally oblivious to the excitement, and somewhat under the influence, remain blissfully unconscious.

Inside the house, my sister tells the other girls what she saw, or at least thinks she saw. At first they're all scared, but then just start laughing. Then they become brave. My sister grabs a flashlight from the kitchen draw, and the three of them venture out into the dark yard. They come off the porch and paint the front of the property with the beam of the flashlight. They see nothing of interest. Now they head towards the back of the house, all huddled together as if the light is some kind of shield. As the beam moves across the open yard and then to the hill at the back of the property, they see this figure, moving quick and steady but awkwardly as if unaccustomed to a new pair of shoes, making its way to the top. Before they can get a good look, it disappears over and down the other side.

My sister wants to go after it, but my two cousins pull her back towards the house. They go inside and wake up my parents. My mother refuses to leave the house, but my father, thinking he's got some sort of burglar or thief running around his property, grabs up his shotgun—.20 gauge—and makes for the hill. Of course, whoever or whatever it is no longer is to be seen. He fires off two shots into the darkness anyway.

Not that she needs to after two shotgun blasts, but my sister then comes over to the van to wake us up to go inside the house. I'm only ask why the old man's blasting away at the night. She tells me her story. My friend, who definitely partied harder than I did, doesn't stir an inch. I tell my sister I'm stayin where I am. So the three girls decide they too are staying outside and set up a watch. All three girls promise they won't fall asleep. Nevertheless, the two cousins are soon nodded-out; my sister is again alone with the stars. She says it's not more than 20 minutes, if even that many, when she hears what sounds like someone talking to themselves in Navajo, but it's old Navajo and she doesn't know what's being said. The sound is

coming from back by the hill and in the direction of the corral. My sister wakes up the other two girls and they run back up to the house.

My sister makes her way back to my parents' room. My dad is out like a light and not responding. My mother, however, is talking in her sleep as if admonishing someone; at the same time she is invoking the name of Jesus. We are Christian, after all. The next morning, when my sister asks her if she remembers any of it, my mother recalls having a dream in which something dark and menacing is outside the door and trying to find its way in. She has no doubt it was intent on evil. She says her prayer made it go away.

Anyway, at the same time my mother is talking in her sleep, my sister feels a presence to the back door of the house of something she describes as evil. All three girls swear there's a heavy smell of something dead which makes them nauseous. No sooner does my mother name Jesus, the feeling and the smell go away.

When morning comes and the sun is up high and bright, the three girls and my mother go outside and have a look around. There up on the hill is a spot in the high grass all flattened down as if something was sitting there. But there are no trails, tracks, or footprints of any kind. As they all come back to the house, my sister leaves the group and goes to the pickup where she left her sandals. She finds upon one of them a clump of long black hair, frizzy and tangled. All of the girls, including my mother, have dark hair, but none of it like that clump. She shows it to my mother, who tells her to immediately throw it into the fire of the stove. She tells her it is the mark of a Skinwalker who intends bad medicine and must be destroyed.

POWER OVER THE MIND

Skinwalker lore does not necessarily limit a particular Skinwalker to a particular transformation. However, it is generally accepted that the Skinwalker takes a preferred form, for example wolf or coyote. These two forms are related to the creation myth in which it is believed the Earth was at one time completely covered with water. The coyote (or wolf), at the time the wisest of Earth's creatures, tired of endless swimming and brought about the creation of land, which leads to the eventual arrival of man. It is also accurate that, beside the bison, at the time the ancestors of the Great Basin native people arrived to the area, the most common animal they encountered

was the coyote.

In addition, the Skinwalker once transformed is recognizable as awkward and unnatural in presentation when compared to the actual beast he is mimicking. As such, while running or loping, the sound he produces is most often associated with the clopping produced by a running horse.

I was only seventeen at the time. This particular night I wake up feeling thirsty. I'm just lying there staring into the dark and deciding if it's worth the effort to get up and get something to drink. All I can hear is the clock ticking out down the hallway and the muted silence. It is just way too quiet. I check the time on my cell phone. It is a few minutes short of 2:30 am.

I sit up and get out of bed. I then make my way towards the door of my bedroom. It is really dark. I go down the hallway towards the kitchen. As I get out to the living room, I chance to look to my right and in the direction of the front door to the house. The only light is coming from a street light that is down at the end of the property and not all that far away. There at the inside of the door—inside the house—I see this figure standing there. Its face at first appears human, then serpent-like, and then back to human, as if it can't decide how it wants to present itself to me. For some reason, I'm just standing there taking this all in. I'm not afraid, but I don't feel like I have any control over my senses either. I'm not sure if I could've moved or said anything even if I wanted to, which at the time, I can't say I did.

As the two of us are standing face to face, he assumes his human features. His face—more handsome than I'd like to admit—is fully painted, a thick stripe of black across his eyes and the rest white. He has a feather woven into the hair at the top of his head. He looks young, not much older than me. He is bare-chested, not real muscular, but definitely cut. His torso is painted red. His lower half is covered in what looks to be khaki-colored pants, well-worn and faded, cut-off and frayed just below the knees. He is bare-footed, but both his wrists and ankles are wrapped with animal skin of some sort. It is hairy and light colored like that of a coyote.

He doesn't say anything to me, not aloud, anyway. But I do hear his words in my head, although for the life of me, I can't remember any of it. It's as if he at the same time with this cold stare of his, working like long fingers, is pinching away layers of my memory.

I do remember wondering why he is in my house, and having the idea that he was expecting to find someone else. Just then he lowers his eyes,

almost as if checking me out. I am, after all, dressed only in my boxers. At the same time, I feel his hold over me fade and begin to feel like myself. Without even thinking about it, my cell phone in my hand, I begin entering 911.

With the phone ringing, I look back to the painted stranger. He gives me a thin smile and vanishes through the door, which, by the way, is closed and locked. To the other side, I hear what sounds like a horse galloping away. I move over to the door and pull it open. I see this figure taking long strides across my yard, away from the street light, and out into the street. There's a car parked on the other side. He goes around to the passenger side, ducks down and into the car, and it drives off.

It all happens in a matter of seconds. I then realize there's a police operator talking back to me from the phone. I tell her there was someone in my house, but I leave out the part about his changing appearance and leaving through a closed door. The operator, or whoever she was, tells me not to worry about it, that mine's not the first call of this kind on this night. She tells me to say a prayer, telling me that she too is Navajo, and go back to bed. I won't be bothered anymore by it.

UNWELCOMED VISITOR

I am Navajo. We had an incident with an unwelcomed visitor in our home. Here's what happened. My cousin is sleeping over. He's the same age as me. We're both thirteen at the time. We are in my room talking and hanging out. It is around maybe 11 pm. It is a pleasant summer evening, so my window is wide open. It is pretty dark outside. My dad is in the living room, supposedly watching TV, but as always he's dozed-off on the couch. My mom has already gone to bed. My cousin and I are keeping it down but not yet ready to call it a night. All of a sudden we hear the screen door to the front of the house open and slam shut. We think it is my dad. Shortly after, my mom—she tells us this the next day—claims she hears footsteps on the carpet. Whoever it is, she says, goes through her room and towards the bathroom. She naturally assumes it's my dad. Then she comes to the realization that she is unable to move as if she is paralyzed.

Still in my room, my cousin and I again hear the screen door open and slam, only this time louder. It wakes-up my dad and he comes to my bedroom to check on us. Finding us both there, he wants to know which one

of my friends just slipped out of the house. It takes a few minutes, but we convince him we were by ourselves, and that we thought it was him going in and out. I can see by the look on his face he's not really buying it, but he has to admit we don't seem to be lying. He leaves and as he's closing the door to my room, he tells us to stay out of trouble and go to sleep. All we could do is shrug.

The next morning, my mom tells us about what she heard and how she could not move. She also tells us that the second time the door slams, she then hears what sounds like horse hooves run by her bedroom window.

She has us all pray. Now every year we hike up the mountain to a high point and we pray for protection from evil.

LONG BLACK HAIR

Skinwalker encounters often occur roadside with people reporting being chased by a Skinwalker at speeds equal to that of a vehicle going over 60 mph. Collisions are also common with damage occurring to the vehicle but after which there is no sign of the Skinwalker, other than, perhaps, some skin or blood left upon the damaged parts of the car. Skinwalkers are rarely described in flattering terms relative to the hair on their bodies. They generally are described as matted, patchy, and mangy.

A woman living in the shallow near Whiteriver, Arizona, comes home late at night from running an errand. She pulls up her driveway, gets out of the vehicle, and using the fob on her key chain, opens the garage door. Just as it's lifting, she hears something run up at her back. As she turns, she sees this dark shadowy figure slip in behind her husband's truck which is in the driveway and to her left. All she sees is that it has patches of short, scraggly hair, and the feet that she saw don't look like they belong to anything human. She runs in through the garage and goes into the house, screaming for her husband. He comes out through the garage and checks all around. He finds nothing. He teases her a bit and tells her she shouldn't let her imagination get the better of her.

Only minutes later, a friend who the husband is expecting arrives. He's all excited and somewhat upset. He explains that as he was coming towards the house, some two-legged creature—he says it looked like a skinny bear, only really mangy and teetering like it was drunk—came stumbling or

hobbling out of the linden trees and straight into the side of his SUV. He slammed on his brakes, but when he got out to look, there was nothing on the road or off to the shoulder. The two then go out to have a look at the SUV. Sure enough, there's a small dent and some black hair stuck to the rear fender on the driver's side, and some hair in the bumper. There's no blood.

COYOTE ENCOUNTER

This is another tale from the Crow. A man from the reservation has just delivered a bull to a buyers' ranch out to the far reaches of the reservation, getting lost for a couple hours in the process. It is a large expanse of land and what maps are available aren't always reliable. Anyway, it's late and getting towards dark by the time he gets back on the main road towards home. Just as he gets to the intersection where there's a stop sign, he sees there up ahead right in the middle of the road a lone coyote. It's just standing there. So before he starts driving he leans on the horn. In response he watches as the coyote raises up on its back legs, assumes the form of a man, only his legs and feet, arms and hands seem more canine than human, and with a spastic gait starts walking towards the opposite shoulder. The man, not believing what he's seeing, closes his eyes and shakes his head. When again he looks, there's the coyote sitting off to the side of the road and looking back at him as if it's waiting him to drive by. The man, certain it's the light playing tricks on him, and the fact that it has been a long and draining drive, does just that. But as he passes the coyote, he gives it a quick look and he sees that it is grinning back at him in a way that is all too human. Having heard stories of Skinwalkers, the man blesses himself, and fixing his eyes on the road ahead, steps on the gas pedal.

A FIRST ENCOUNTER

One summer when I was only fourteen years old I spent a couple of weeks at my grandparents' house on the Navajo reservation in Arizona. It was close to the New Mexico state line. Although it was out in the middle of the hills, it was an awesome place. My little brother—he was 11—and I loved it. My grandmother was a great cook, she makes the best fried bread; and my grandfather tells great stories, the kind you can't hear anywhere else. Now, thanks to that visit there, I have a story of my own.

My grandparents have this old guy, a Navajo too, who does odd jobs around the house and property. His name is Pau and he is a nice enough guy, despite the fact that he probably drinks more than is good for him; he carries around this silver flask. One evening right as the sun is going down, my grandmother asks me to take him home. My grandfather usually does it, but he is out at a neighbor's ranch helping with some cattle. I say sure. It gives me the chance to drive my grandfather's old pickup truck, something I am not allowed to do back home. But there on the reservation no one cares. There's so few people around, it's not like you're going to hurt anyone. So my little brother jumps in with me while Pau and my grandparent's dog climb into the bed. Pau lives in a small Hogan about ten minutes deeper into the reservation. By the time we drop him off, the sun is already going down, a dark red blanket up and over the trees.

Back on the road—and there's no street lights of any kind—we are driving along when out of the corner of my eye I notice some movement there in the scrub and low bushes off to the side. I slow down. There are all kinds of sheep around there, the people who own them letting them roam about the place freely. I don't want to have to explain to my grandmother why there is blood and sheep wool in the front grill. As we drive past the spot where I saw the movement, there's nothing there. So I resume speed, bumping along the dirt road without a care in the world. Then out of nowhere we get a strong whiff of something nasty as if some animal has died and is rotting where it fell. With it comes this sense of deep dread for which I have no explanation. My little brother feels it too. He doesn't say as much, but I can see it on his face, like he is going to wet himself. I tell him all is good and we keep on driving.

Moments later, I look in the rearview mirror and see this dark silhouette of something very tall and very skinny covered with some kind of hair or fur running behind the truck after us. Whatever it is, it doesn't look human. My brother sees it too and starts crying. My grandparents' dog is back in the bed barking ferociously. I want to make the truck go faster, but the dirt road is so uneven and the pickup is bouncing and shaking all over the place as it is. I'm afraid if I go any faster I'll crash it off the road. My brother then screams that it is coming up alongside the truck on my side. I am so scared that all I'm thinking is that this thing is going to get us. Then just as I'm ready to cry too, around the bend and coming at us is this car. Just like that, the feeling of dread and panic disappears. Whatever was chasing us is

now gone.

When we get back to my grandparent's place, we run into the house checking at our backs to make sure we weren't followed. My grandmother, obviously seeing that we are upset, asks, "What's the matter?" We can't get the story out fast enough. She tells us it was Yee Nadlooshii, something the Navajo call a Skinwalker. She explains they are people who use black magic and bad medicine to bedevil folks and do mischief.

I have been back there many times since then, but this is my only encounter with a Skinwalker.

THE SKINWALKER'S GAME

The odor most associated with the presence of a Skinwalker is that of death, meaning that sweet and putrid odor that one immediately identifies with a dead and rotting animal, for example a raccoon or dog left lying alongside the road. The smell is also often described as that of a wet or old dog. They are also associated with a chattering sound, or something high pitched, like the screech of a monkey.

My friend and I were at a party on the Hopi reservation in Polaca. It was really late and we had a pretty good buzz on. Most of the people we knew had already trickled out, so we decided it was as good a time as any to leave. We looked around for the friend who was supposed to give us a ride; we had all come together. We found him in a back bedroom, drunk and passed out. We had no choice but to walk.

The two of us lived on the other side of the gulch, a good two miles, between which was nothing but trees, scrub brush, and some hills. We had barely cleared the houses and onto the road passing between the wooded area, when we got this funny feeling we were being watched. We decided to leave the road and cut through the trees. It wasn't the easiest walk, but it would cut the distance down some, and though it was pitch black outside, we knew the way pretty well.

We had been a good twenty minutes off the road and heading up towards the hills, when that same feeling of being watched came upon us again. We both turned around at the same time, but it was so dark we couldn't see anything. But then my friend, Paul, swore he heard some kind of cackling or mumbling. I didn't hear anything except for maybe the wind in

the top of the trees at our back.

By that time, although neither one of us was going to admit it, we were feeling a little scared. Without saying a word, we picked up the pace, moving along pretty good but not running. And that's when I heard it too, but now it was more like heavy breathing or a sort of raspy sound. Paul grabbed my arm and gave me tug forward. We took off running straight up the hill, which not all that big, was still enough of a slope so I was feeling it in my legs—and I was drunk. Whatever it was, though, stayed with us every step of the way. Right at the top, Paul and I stopped and turned around, expecting the thing to be right on us. But we were standing there, huffing and puffing, and looking at nothing but darkness. Seconds later we heard a thin laughter as if it was coming from down the hill and back from where we started running. We decided to keep moving and put some distance between us.

We turned to go down the other side of the hill, and there standing right in front of us was this creature. It was standing up on two legs like a circus dog, only much taller, with both paws extended out in front of it. It had this coyote face, with the snout and all, and was grinning at us, all of its teeth exposed and its tongue lolling to one side. I couldn't believe how skinny it was, as if it hadn't eaten in weeks, its rounded stomach sticking out like one of those African kids in the charity ads, and the skin sinking between its ribs. The smell was unbelievably bad, like the smell of old, wet dog. We both jumped back with a scream—like two little school girls. As we did, the creature dropped down onto all fours and ran past us and down the hill back where we had come from. It was yipping and laughing all the way.

Paul and I were praying like never before, swearing to Jesus if he got us home safe we'd never drink again. The laughing, or yipping, or whatever you want to call it, died down and disappeared. Wasting no time, the two of us made our way down that hill and into the trees separating us from where we lived. As we walked along, we were trying to convince each other everything was cool: It was only a coyote out searching for a meal; we scared it; it jumped up at us, and then it ran away.

Feeling better about things, we got across the open field and into the trees. We made it all the way through there, too, without anything else happening. However, just as we stepped out towards that first back yard we needed to cut through to get to the street, we heard this unmistakable chatter, like some little monkey laughing, come out of the trees just behind us. It was followed by the sound of something moving through the leaves and twigs.

Paul yelled out some saying he later told me his grandmother taught him. Just like that the noise ceased and it got real quiet. He then grabbed my arm again and we tore out as fast as we could through that yard and out to the road. We ran straight for the house where Paul lives with his grandmother. When we got there, we found her awake and sitting in the kitchen with only a small candle for light. She was burning some cedar. When she saw us, she put her finger up to her lips and then pointed to the outside of the house. Her lips were moving but silently. We stood there like statues for a minute or two, and then she spoke aloud, saying it was okay. She said a prayer and the Skinwalker was gone. I have no idea how she knew, and I didn't care. Needless to say, I spent the rest of the night there sleeping where I knew I'd be safe.

THE MEDICINE MAN

The unexplainable sound of a flute being played is an indication that a Skinwalker is present. The flute was a traditional instrument of the natives that first settled the Great Basin, the music of which was prominent in rituals and ceremonies. The Skinwalker uses flute music to communicate with the spirits there in the alternate planes or dimensions.

I was working on a ranch in Chinle one summer, near Canyon de Chelly. It was a fairly big spread, a couple hundred acres, at least. We had been having problems with coyotes getting into the sheep pens at night. The guy I was working for, Duane, sent me and his middle son, he was about seventeen, out to make sure the gate on the corral at the southern end of the property was closed. The younger boy, he was maybe 11, asked if he could come too. So we let him jump in the back of the Jeep. It was after dark. The drive out there was a good ten or 15 minutes. Duane's kid was behind the wheel.

I was sitting in the passenger seat, my head back and my eyes half-closed, just enjoying the cool night air and the quiet. When we got there, Duane's kid, his name was Jay, sent his little brother, Aaron, out to check the gate. It was only 20 or so yards off the road and to the far side of some posts with chicken wire. My eyes were still kind of closed when I heard this whistling. But it wasn't like a person, more like a flute, the reed kind with the holes punched through it. It was a simple melody, but deep and resonant.

Out of nowhere, Jay starts yelling for Aaron to get back in the Jeep, and it's like he's not kidding. Just the way he was yelling, the tone, caused me to bolt up and had my heart racing, as if something bad was about to happen. He kept asking me, his voice in near panic, "Do you hear that?"

"Sounds like some kind of flute," I said.

Just at that moment, Aaron launches himself into the back of the Jeep, his eyes as wide as saucers and looking as if he is ready to cry. Jay turns the key, and practically before the engine turns over, he's got his weight on the gas pedal like he's afraid it's going to push back. The wheels start spinning. Dirt and pebbles are flying all over the place. No sooner does Jay get us in motion, the sound of the flute is right there as if whoever is playing it is just there in the dark. But I didn't see a damn thing.

As soon as we get back to the ranch house, the two boys run in and tell Duane what happened. The next day, he goes into the settlement and comes back with the medicine man. The old guy spends more than half the day going around and blessing every part of the ranch. When he leaves, he tells us to be careful and not go out alone at night; he's certain there's a Skinwalker on the prowl.

THE HOGAN

The coyote, generally, was not highly thought of by the ancient peoples of the Great Basin, nor by the natives that settled further south in what is now Mexico and Central America. The first coyote—one of the gods, named First Scold Coyote, was thought to have no respect for holy things. Another name for this canine is 'the trickster'. Even today the natives of the Great Basin associate the coyote with bad luck, bad omens, and nuisance occurrences. Skinwalkers are known to wear coyote pelts, including that of the head, including the ears and muzzle.

This incident took place when I was seventeen. I was with family. We were in the area of Butterfly Butte going through the mountains near Window Rock, Arizona. It was late at night and all around us as we drove was darkness and tall trees. We were in a pickup truck. I was sitting in the front with my sister and her husband, who was driving. My two brothers and cousin were sitting back in the bed.

All of a sudden this critter runs out in front of us and across the

headlights. I think it's a deer. My brother-in-law, Eddie, said it was a coyote. It happened so fast. But just in case, we say a prayer. Coyotes often portend bad luck.

Well, we soon forgot about it, driving along and talking, when up in front of us there just standing in the middle of the county road are four more coyotes. Now, I've seen lots of coyotes out where we live, but rarely do we see them more than two at a time, and even less sitting in the road. Eddie slows the truck, but they stay right there almost as if daring him. Then when it looks like he's going to have to stop or hit them, they saunter off towards the shoulder and disappear into the trees. Eddie then makes a remark that something spooky is going on and he wants to get home as soon as possible. But my sister tells him better safe than sorry and not to go too fast.

Now the only thing worse to us Navajos than coyotes appearing out of nowhere is the hoot of the owl. While most of the time it's no big deal, just odd looking birds hunting for mice, when you hear them the way we did, something's not right. It could mean that someone close to you is in danger. The fact is, if they are hunting they are usually quiet. Anyway, we start hearing these owl hoots, one after the other, as if they are calling ahead alerting some dark entity that we are on our way. More curious than that, there were six of us in that truck and I know I counted six hoots.

The turn-off from the county road is a dirt road and it is less than ten minutes from our house. Eddie is driving along going a little faster than my sister is comfortable with. Looking back over my shoulder, I can see the rest of them there in the bed bouncing and sliding around a little. Only a minute or two down the road, we can see the lights from the houses—still in the distance, but close enough where we're all feeling better about things.

Suddenly, Eddie slams on the brakes and yanks the truck to the left. I see something big and black and definitely upright rear right up in front of us. Despite Eddie's efforts, the truck runs right into it. We hit it so hard that it sounded like a gun going off. I was holding on tight to the door and seat, but I could hear the rest of my family being thrown around in the back. They were screaming and cursing.

Eddie managed to get control of the vehicle pretty fast. When it stopped, I jumped out to make sure my two brothers and my cousin were okay. They were only banged up a little, which is more than I can say for the pickup. The whole nose was totaled. The only thing still intact was one head light, which was still lit up.

As we're standing around the truck, we're all looking to the right of the road, where less than six feet away is this six-foot high chain link fence that runs along the shoulder in both directions for as far as the eye can see. The woods beyond the fence goes all the way back into the hills. The point is that there is no way that whatever we hit took off in that direction, or even came at us from that way. Basically, it came out of nowhere, as if it loomed up from the surface of the road itself or dropped down out of the sky.

Meanwhile, Eddie was taking a closer look at the damage. It was, after all, his truck. He noted there was some skin, hair, and blood on what remained of the grill, along the lip of the hood, and even by the light fixture that was broken. Convinced that whatever it was, it was hurt and probably crumbled up nearby, we looked around up and down the road and off the shoulder to the left. We found nothing.

As it was really dark, and things were kind of eerie, we decided we'd come back when the sun was up and look around. We all piled back in the truck, but Eddie couldn't get it started. He'd turn the key in the ignition and not even get a sound, as if there was no battery. The funny thing, though, is that one headlight was still on—go figure.

No sooner had Eddie finished cursing and punching the steering wheel, we hear off in the darkness and in the trees to the left some whistling and laughing, as if someone is playing games with us. One second it seems to be coming from over here, the next second from over there, and then after that from back a ways. It went on like this for like ten minutes. My sister tells us it's a Skinwalker and starts whispering Navajo prayers.

By this time only my sister is still in the truck. Eddie and I are standing by the bed on the driver's side, and my two brothers and cousin are in the bed. My older brother, Nicky, is unafraid—he thinks it's just some idiot in the woods—and volunteers to run to the house and come back with my father's car. The house is less than a mile away.

No sooner does he start jogging off, we hear the laughter and whistling go with him as if he is being followed. He told us later that he was aware of it, and although he thought he heard his name being whispered, he just keep jogging along all the same.

About 10 minutes later we see these headlights coming towards us. It was Nicky. When we all got back to the house, Eddie called the sheriff to report the accident. It was really late, but he told Eddie he would meet him there and have a look just in case somebody did get hit. I went back with

Eddie in my dad's car. The sheriff showed up only a few minutes later. He had one of those industrial-sized flashlights, but as much as he looked around, he couldn't find anything either. He agreed by the look of the hair left behind that whatever we hit, it wasn't a deer.

When we told him about the whistling and laughter, his whole demeanor sort of changed. It was obvious that he was no longer interested in standing out there in the dark. He went back to his car and wrote out one of those little accident reports and gave it to Eddie.

The next day, my mother had a friend of hers come to the Hogan. She was this really old woman we were afraid of when we were kids. She had this small crystal-like gem, sort of a pale yellow in color that she held up and looked through. As if she could see into the past, she told my mother there was a fierce battle of wills between a local medicine man and a Skinwalker last night, and that if it wasn't for the medicine man distracting the Skinwalker, all six of us would have died when the truck went out of control and hit the trees.

She never did tell us who that medicine man was or the Skinwalker, though she hinted she knew them both. And interestingly enough, when Eddie went back for the truck the next morning, it started right up without a problem.

TRANSFORMATION

Skinwalkers, as do medicine men, derive their ability to transform from totems. Totems allow them to communicate with the spirits of the alternate planes or dimensions. Generally, the totem is some prominent body part of the animal with which they most associate. Eagle feathers, snake fangs, and wolf and bear claws are some of the more common totems.

This brief encounter takes place the summer my boyfriend and I became engaged. I was certain is was a dark omen for things to come.

The sun had just slipped behind the hills to the west. It was a beautiful night with a cool breeze coming out of the north—the perfect setting for taking a walk with someone you love. My fiancé and I set out just past the property, making our way leisurely across this open field and down toward the creek. As soon as we neared the trees, I noticed a tall, upright shadow. It suddenly shrunk down and slipped to the back of this majestic

cedar that stands about a hundred feet from the creek. I stopped in my tracks. Holding my fiancé's hand even tighter, I pointed to the tree and told him what I saw. He bent and picked a few stones from the ground. With his left hand he moved me to his back as if for protection. He then took a few steps forward, and with his right hand, threw the rocks towards the tree. His second throw hit it square. Immediately, a huge brown owl took to flight, soaring out over the creek. I have never one as big in these parts! The wings had a span longer than my arms.

It might have been dusk, but I know that what I saw duck behind that tree was no owl. I believe whatever it was transformed itself and then flew off. In fact, I'm convinced. After that, our summer took a turn for the worse, my fiancé and I seeing more owls than we had ever seen before, and every time after which something would go wrong. We did, however, get married, and so far, so good.

CORN POLLEN

Corn pollen is considered sacred to the Navajo people. However, as essential an element it is to their spiritual beliefs, its origin as a sacred element is not readily understood nor is it given much attention in existing literature on the subject of the Navajo people. Looking back upon the Creator Story, it is told that Changing Woman, one of the Gods, was responsible for the creation of the first six holy people, each of whom she named after some aspect of corn and whom she dressed in corn pollen. Since then, corn pollen has been considered a holy element.

My name is Miles. This story is of an encounter my grandparents had. They are Navajo—full blooded—and live in the Canyon de Chelly. One night my grandmother is out collecting firewood for the Hogan, just sticks and branches from out beneath the trees. It is an ordinary night like any other. Coming back towards the coral, she hears a sound. At first she doesn't pay it much mind. She has no reason to believe it is anything other than the sheep, the silhouettes of which she can see huddled together. She continues to move back to the Hogan, pushing before her the small wheelbarrow in which she is carrying her firewood. But then she hears what she describes as a frightened yelp, like a coyote or perhaps a rabbit in distress. She responds by saying in Navajo, "Go away and leave us alone." Frightened herself, she leaves the

wheelbarrow where it is and hurries back into the Hogan. She tells my grandfather what she hears, and he, thinking there's a coyote trying to get at the sheep, retrieves his rifle and runs out towards the corral. He doesn't see anything, but fires two shoots up in the air to frighten off whatever may be out there.

Later on that night, and sure that he had scared off whatever it was, the fire in the Hogan burning warm, they go off to bed. No sooner does my grandfather fall asleep, he hears a tapping on the window as if from a set of long finger nails. Not wanting to wake my grandmother, he gets up from the bed and moves quietly towards the window. As he approaches the pane, he sees just off to the side, outside and close to the house, a pair of glowing eyes —he describes them as marble black and with just a hint of the moon's reflection—and he hears his name being whispered.

All he knows from there is that everything suddenly goes dark and he must have passed out. When he wakes that next morning, he is still on the floor, but nearer to the fire, and my grandmother is tending to him. She tells him that she was sleeping when she hears a heavy thump, wakes up and sees him lying on the floor. There is a dark shape next to him and standing tall. She said that she grabs her corn pollen and starts praying in Navajo. The dark shape must have heard her because it backs off and steps towards the window. She then hurries to my grandfather's side. Using the corn pollen, she draws a line between them and the Skinwalker—or so she called it. The Skinwalker wouldn't cross the line. And then suddenly it is gone.

She says to this day that she doesn't know if it was the corn pollen that drove it away, but nevertheless, she is never without it in the Hogan.

MIND GAMES

As a trickster, the Skinwalker can make people see things that aren't real. The Skinwalker derives purpose from troubling people.

My friends call me Bear Claw. I am in middle school. I am Navajo and this is my story of an encounter with a Skinwalker. My best friend and I are hanging out at my house, just doing the things kids our age do. It's a Friday and just getting dark. We are in my room at the back of the house, when out of nowhere we hear my dog Wolf start yelping and crying. But it isn't normal dog whining—you know, when they want to come in or

something like that. This crying sounds like he has been hit by a car or something. We both jump up, run through the kitchen, out through the back door, and down the porch into the yard. I'm thinking he had another run-in with a porcupine. We get out there and we see Wolf. He's pretty far from the house where the property runs out towards the ridge. From where we are standing it looks as if his jaw is unhinged and hanging really low, like it's dislocated or broken.

Crying and yowling, he turns away from my call—it looks like a part of the back of his head has been bloodied and caved in—and runs off towards the ridge. We run after him. When we find him, he is sitting there where the ridge drops off. He's whining quietly. There not too far from him and standing over by these rocks that climb taller than our heads—we can only see its profile—is a big black, hairy figure with a dog's face.

Suddenly, Wolf jumps up and runs back towards us, this creature in full pursuit. My friend yells out 'holy shit' and takes off running for the house. I didn't stand around too much longer either, with no desire on my part to get a better look at this thing, whatever it was. We both tear ass all the way back to the porch, and me with no idea which direction Wolf wound up going.

As soon as we get to the back of the house we start yelling for my mother. She comes out wondering what all the fuss is about. When we manage to catch our breath and tell her what we saw, she smirks, telling us not to be silly and wasting her time; she says she just gave Wolf the leftover chicken from dinner. Sure enough, just then he comes out from under the porch as if without a worry in the world, not a mark on him.

SHE-WOLF

This story makes a reference to cadaver dust, calling it moon dust. The dust has a similar effect, which is to temporarily immobilize the victim. The Skinwalker is female and consistent with the folklore, it is perceived as unnatural in body and gait. It is also wounded by a gunshot which toes the line of the mythology which provides for the Skinwalker's invulnerability to weapons. The wound also serves to suggest the identity of the Skinwalker, but fall short of certainty. There is also the suggestion that Skinwalkers are near immortals living extended lives in terms of years.

This is a story my mom tells. When she was a young girl, her family used to move throughout north-western New Mexico from ranch to ranch, most of which were out on the reservation in the middle of nowhere, her father taking work where he could get it. When she was about eleven—the family living in this small house with basic electricity and running water, one night after she had gone to bed she was awakened by the ranch dogs barking. While not an odd occurrence in itself, this time the intensity is more than usual.

She says she opens her eyes and staring there into the darkness she makes out this black against black figure standing over her right there beside her bed. Its outline is just barely visible in the moonlight from outside her window. She says that she is so scared that her only thought is to get up and run to her parents' room. But as soon as she tries to move, moon dust—that's what she thought it was back then—starts drifting down over her like gently falling snow. She remembers wanting to cover her face but she finds she can't move. So she just lays there, scared and wanting to cry—but she can't. Soon, she's not sure how long, the shadowy figure disappears.

Once it is gone, she is able to move again. She gets up and runs to her brothers' room, which is right next to hers. She wakes up her biggest brother and tells him she's scared and doesn't want to go back to her room. To make her happy and so that she would go back to bed, he goes outside the house and checks around. He doesn't find anything, but when he looks outside his sister's window he sees what looks like dog tracks, but the rear paw prints only. They lead from her window off into the fields and then just stop in the middle of nowhere.

So the next night her two brothers camp out on top of this shade house next to the tree line to see if they can catch what they believe is a brazen coyote or two. Shortly after midnight they are shaken from their sleep, again by the dogs barking. Looking down from the house top, they see this thing, some sort of creature, hopping out in the fields. It is way too big to be a rabbit, and it is moving steadily towards the house. The big brother has a .22 rifle used for hunting small game. He waits for the creature to hop up again; and when it does, he fires. Though at the time he isn't sure where, he is sure that he hits it. It lets out a high-pitched scream like a woman then takes off running back into the reservation. The next morning the two boys tell their parents and sister—my mother—their story.

Later that same afternoon, the ranch boss drives off to pick up this

woman he is seeing to bring her back to his place on the ranch for supper. My mother remembers her as a little creepy and with a sort of stale smell about her. That evening, after they've eaten, the two of them go for a walk. The ranch boss puts his arm around her shoulder, and she winces as if in pain. When he inquires as to her wellbeing, she lowers the shoulder of her dress a tad and he sees there's a bandage covering the area beneath the nape of her neck and to the right shoulder. When he asks her what happened, she tells him one of the tools hanging in the barn had fallen on her and cut her pretty good. When he asks if she would like him to have a look at it, she becomes somewhat curt with him, assuring him there's nothing to it. He, however, gets the feeling she's hiding something, but doesn't pursue the matter.

From what my mom says, the two of them stop dating shortly after. As far as she knows, the woman is still alive to this day. Supposedly she lives in a Hogan with no windows somewhere out in the canyon by itself near some trees and a wash. No one goes there. My mother thinks it's curious that she's still alive after all these years, saying if she's not a hundred years old, she's real close.

GHOST FIRES

Skinwalkers were generally believed to be most powerful when victimizing family members or members of their own tribe. Later the lore evolved into a broader application of their powers and motives, more specifically to take vengeance upon rival tribes. The Navajo, for example, were often victimized by the Ute, who having mastered the horse through an alliance with the Spaniards, would often raid the Navajo camps to steal away their women and children who were then sold or traded to slave runners further south. As a result, the Skinwalker would be summoned in a more spiritual presentation, transforming into a creature with supernatural powers to take vengeance upon the Ute, causing its victims to take their own lives, to go crazy, or to wander lost in the canyons for eternity.

This story comes from a 28 year-old young man who calls himself Hughie. When he was a boy, his grandmother, a Navajo woman, would tell him stories about dark spirits and Skinwalkers. He recalls he used to wave her off, telling her there were no such things. In fact, just to get her goat, whenever he would go out at night, he'd make sure to tell her and tease that

he'd be walking alone. However, his arrogance and haughtiness came back to haunt him, as it were, shortly after his 17th birthday.

On the evening in question, he is out cruising about with two of his cousins, just drinking a few beers, listening to tunes, and doing a whole bunch of laughing. From St. Michaels, Arizona, their purposeless meandering takes them through Fort Defiance and Sawmill, and then along the back roads in and around Chinle, where they eventually get lost for a while.

Driving deep in the woods and looking for anything they might recognize as a way back to the road, Hughie is sitting in the backseat on the passenger side and looking out the window. He recalls it is definitely after ten PM. There deep in the trees he sees a single fire, the flames contained to a small space and close to the ground. He is just about to say something to the others, when they too react. Looking now in the direction they are pointing, he sees many more of these small fires, literally dozens of them, popping up there within the trees, burning brightly for a moment or two, and then going out, only to have others ignite but a few feet or yards away. This goes on all the while they are driving along through this one stretch, and seems to be keeping pace with them.

Hughie first has the thought that it is a controlled fire process, something the local rangers and fire department do to control the undergrowth to reduce the potential for out-of-control forest fires. But being that it is night time, he quickly discards the idea. Besides, he notices, and mentions to his two cousins, that the fires so close to the base of the trees should be setting them on fire too. Yet not one of them goes up or, from where he's looking, even gets scorched.

Both spooked and intrigued, they pull the car alongside the road and get out, beers in hand. However, the stay by the car with no desire to actually go into the woods. One of the cousins starts calling out to see if anyone will answer. The other cousin is less eager, telling everyone to be quiet and listen. But there's nothing to listen too. The fires, which continue to flare up and die down, aren't making any noise. For example, there's no crackling of burning leaves or small twigs. Then within seconds, they find themselves standing in the dark—every fire has gone out and there's no new ones.

Not believing their own eyes, they walk into the trees towards where they agree one of the nearer fires had been. But no matter how much they look around, they can't find any sign of fire: no wisps of smoke, no charred ground, and no ashes—nothing. There isn't even the smell of burned leaves

or wood they expect to linger. But even odder still, when they do go back to the car, they can't help but notice the smell of smoke on their clothing.

The next morning Hughie tells his grandmother and mother what he had seen. While his mother shows very little interest, there is a knowing gleam in the eyes of his grandmother, but she has nothing to say.

Almost immediately after that night, Hughie says, everything that could possibly go wrong does. First, each one of his cousins are involved in unexplainable accidents and are hurt seriously enough. The one receives a second degree burn when the gas tank of a motorcycle he is working on ignites without reason or warning. The second suffers a broken collar bone when the branch of a tree in his yard snaps and comes down across his shoulder. He, too, has no warning, although he acknowledges it is the same tree that was hit by lightning a month or so earlier. Oddly enough, both accidents happen on the same day and almost at the same time. As for Hughie, although much less painful, all of the family vehicles break down within days of each other.

It is at this point the family makes the decision to seek the help of the local medicine man. Together they climb into his aunt's car—she's the mother of the cousin with the broken collar bone, which had worked fine earlier that day, and it refuses to start. Hughie suggests it's the battery, so they attempt to jump start it with his grandfather's truck. It is not in the best shape, is driven only locally, and not even properly registered or insured, but it always starts. But it too won't turn over. Finally, they find a neighbor who is nice enough to take them.

When they get to the medicine man and tell him everything, starting with the fires, he says to them, "You already know who is doing this to you." Hughie recalls they all just look at one another, each without a clue. His grandmother, however, tells them she'll explain it on the ride back home. She sends them out to the car to wait while she speaks with the medicine man. When she comes back she tells them it'll all be okay.

On the way back, Hughie's grandmother tells them about her great-grandfather. She says the family had a 30 acre plot which they had been living on for generations. When he passed away, and before his own children could lay claim to the property, a man and his wife built themselves a crude Hogan on the far side of the property and moved in. When her great-grandfather's sons, one of whom was her grandfather, tried to evict the man from the property, he used dark medicine to chase them off. He even kept her

own father from building a house on the far side of the property along the arroyo. She then tells Hughie that the woods in which he and his cousins saw the fires is the outer edge of that property, and the smoke they smelled on themselves was the mark of the Skinwalker. She says the old squatter and his wife are both more than a hundred years old, and though no one has seen them for years, she's certain they live there still.

All Hughie knows is that since the visit with the medicine man, he and his family have had no further experiences with the Skinwalker. He says there are nights when the dogs bark fiercely and try to break free of their chains, like there's something out in the dark which they want no part of. On those nights, Hughie is sure to say his prayers, both in Navajo and the ones he learned in the Catholic Church, certain the words will protect him from the old man and his wife, two powerful Skinwalkers he doesn't want playing around in his head.

STRANGE FOOTPRINTS

The Skinwalker, once transformed, is capable of superhuman feats such as running at exceptional speeds, scaling cliff walls or the walls of houses, leaping great distances, and even transporting itself from one point to another. Those who encounter Skinwalkers often tell of them scampering up to and running across roof tops, routinely leaping from the roof of one house to the roof of a neighboring house and over distances of twenty feet or more. In addition, trails left behind (footprints) by a Skinwalker often come to a sudden and inexplicable end as if it suddenly vanished into thin air.

This story takes place on a reservation in north-eastern Utah. There is a Ute family living in a small house within a narrow band of trees among the canyons. The house has no running water—there's actually an outhouse, only basic electricity, and no internet service. The nearest neighbor is acres away, and there are no street lights of any kind to chase away the dark at night.

On this particular evening, it is about 10:00 at night, the dogs start barking up a storm. For the family inside, it usually means there's porcupines about. The dogs go crazy over porcupines. Anyway, given how dark it is outside, no one in the house has any interest in investigating. Moments later, they notice that the dogs seem to be running around the perimeter of the house, as if they are chasing something, or perhaps being chased. There's

some intense growling, and then as if something is thrown or flung against the side of the house, there is a heavy thump. But instead of it ending there, it then sounds as if something is scampering along the wall and towards the roof, similar to the sounds a squirrel might make when it's on the roof. Only this noise is coming from the side of the house, from the walls, and it is much too loud and heavy to be a squirrel.

At this point, the family inside is inexplicably terrified, the children hiding beneath their beds, the women huddling together, and the men looking to arm themselves. Coming from over their heads, and as loud and clear as if the roof itself was not there, is a weird, almost alien chattering, which though not a word they can understand, nonetheless sounds intelligible. It sounds like to the family that there are two creatures of some sort communicating back and forth to each other from up on their roof. They, too, can hear footsteps moving from one side to another and back to front as if the things are looking for a way off and to escape the dogs, who can still be heard whining and circling the house. This activity goes on for a matter of minutes and then just stops.

Come morning, the men go outside to have a look. They find no sign of anything but dog prints running around the house. There is also nothing that would suggest there was anything moving along the surface of the outer walls. However, there upon the roof, up to which one of the men climbs using a ladder, they find here and there clearly marked in the greenish-growth which has accumulated upon the side away from the sun what look to be small footprints, no bigger than what I child would make, only they are not human. Instead, they look sort of like bowling pins, fatter and more rounded at the front and longer and thinner to the rear.

Speaking days later with other locals, the family discovers that similar prints were found by others, though not on their roofs, and that a bright light was seen to light up a part of the canyon. Some even told of experiencing a power outage. No one, however, felt any need to offer up an explanation, saying only that is the way of life on the reservation.

NAME NOT THE SKINWALKER

The belief is that if you talk about Skinwalkers it is the same as calling out to them or inviting them to take an interest in you. In general, the Diné—Native Americans from the Great Basin area—do not speak about

Skinwalkers.

My older sister, who is Irish-Italian, recently got married—not her first—to this guy who is Navajo.

Shortly after they settle down together—she has a boy from her first marriage—they invite me to hang out with them down on the reservation where her new husband has a house and some property. I brought a few friends.

Being a white guy, I know nothing about Indian or Skinwalker lore. One of the friends that comes along, Gregory, however, is into horror and demons, things like that, and knows all these different werewolf, vampire, and even Skinwalker stories. That first night, with not much else to do—we are out in the middle of a few hundred thousand acres of hills and wooded land, we end up sitting around a small bonfire with him telling us one story after the next.

The next day we all take a walk to the elementary school to bring my nephew home. Usually my sister picks him up, but she has some errands to run. Along the way we pass this scraggly looking dude sitting beneath this hoary tree beside the road. He looks kind of old, but in a way that is difficult to say just how old. Regardless, it's definitely creepy the way he's watching us, his eyes kind of flat and dull as if unaffected by the sunlight.

As we make our way back from the school, my nephew seems unusually quiet and shy. When he sees this guy, he ducks behind me and starts tugging on my shirt. I ask him what's up, and without taking his eyes off the guy, he whispers, "I don't like that man. He's bad." The way he said it gives me the chills, but I really don't think all that much more about it.

Well that night Gregory and my other two friends, Jeff and Sara, and I all head out to go check out this abandoned part of the reservation which supposedly is haunted. We had been warned not to by my brother-in-law. He says it is inhabited by ghosts of the past and some kind of dark being. Of course, that only serves to make us want to go even more. So we dismiss his warnings and ghost stories, take the keys to my sister's SUV, and off we go.

When we first get there I have to admit it is a lot spookier looking and feeling than anyone of us had expected. Consisting of only a handful of abandoned structures, most of faded and graying wood, and the biggest of which is only two stories, it looks to me to have been some sort of mining town, like the kind you see on westerns on TV. Anyway, just about every

window is completely busted out, with only a shard of pointed pane hanging here and there. There isn’t a single door still in place, and definitely not an item of any value anywhere to be seen. In fact, there isn’t much of anything at all.

As we walk around, going up to and looking into some of the places, but not entering, Jeff takes to telling us how this reminds him of one of his past flings with some girl. Sara and I roll our eyes as we always do when he starts waxing nostalgic and then go off a little ways, leaving him and Gregory together. We find a cozy corner out of sight and start getting comfortable, if you know what I mean. We are going at it for all of five seconds when we both notice it has suddenly turned chill. Just as we huddle closer together for warmth we hear a blood curdling scream. We jump up and run back in the direction of the SUV and where we last saw Gregory and Jeff. There they are facing the remains of this store front, their eyes staring straight ahead and oblivious to the fact we are there. Sara and I both look to where they are staring and we see this creature that is as wolf-like as can be without being a wolf.

I still am not sure to this day if it was real or just us. Either way, I for one am as irrationally frightened as I have ever been in my life. Its body is fully covered in hair and it has these long wraith-like fingers which end in thick, curled nails—definitely claw-like. Its head is the worst though. Its eyes are just these two chunks of dark coal, flat and emotionless; its mouth is full of small daggers. I'm not sure how long we stand there frozen, probably only a few seconds but it felt like much more. Finally it takes a step forward and as if released from some spell we bolt to the truck. Jeff and I jump into the front seat, he to the driver’s side and me in the passenger, while Gregory and Sara go for the back. Jeff doesn’t have his license but at that point no one’s arguing. The keys are in the ignition.

He starts the SUV, floors the gas, and we speed off, gravel and sand flying everywhere. I look out the window on my side, and then all around. I see nothing through the cloud of dust and the darkening twilight. When I turn to look back at Gregory, the only thing he could think to say is 'you’ve got some lipstick on your chin.’

Just down the road some, Jeff slows the truck. By this time we are all laughing and making fun of each other for running away from shadows. Just then a look of fright comes over Sara’s face, and without saying a word, she points a trembling finger out towards the trees along the side of the road.

There back in the dark of the trees we see this shadow-like figure running just inside the tree line as if keeping pace with us. “Go, go, go,” we all yell in unison to Jeff and he again presses down on the gas, the SUV springing to life. But that thing, whatever it is, stays with us every inch of the way. It is only when we see the lights to my sister’s porch and make the turn off to her drive that we notice it is gone.

Coincidentally enough, when we pull up to the house, my brother-in-law is out on the porch with this guy dressed in a long-sleeved buttoned white shirt, blue jeans, and work boots. He later introduces him as the local shaman. We when get up to the porch, the guy is in the middle of some kind of blessing. When he finishes, my brother-in-law simply turns to us and says, “Now you know; maybe next time you’ll listen.” Later, after the shaman leaves, he admonishes us, saying that by telling the Skinwalker stories we put everyone there in danger. He said just mentioning them can make them come and seek you out.

CLAWED

I’ll tell you something that’s true and real. My grandpa Robert lived in Myton, Utah. He always told stories about Skinwalkers and how they could take the form of any animal or anyone you know. I asked him one day if he had ever met one. He told me that he did, a long time ago when he was, as he said, young and foolish. It was long before I was born, or even my mother. He explained that he had gone to the valley. He called it Skinwalker Valley. He said it was a valley where nothing living ever ventures, and where even crows, the guardians of death itself, won’t go. It is a place of darkness and evil.

He told me he went out there because he wanted to show others there was nothing to fear, nothing but silly superstition. He says he went out there in his old pick-up truck, red in color but faded. When he found the valley, he saw that the grass on the ground and all of the trees were black and scarred, as if from fire. The trees, though, he swore, yet lived. Not far from where he exited his truck, he saw a house. It was very old, the roof fallen in, and the door gone. When he grew nearer to it, he noticed what looked to be deep scratch or claw marks on the side walls. He described, too, seeing the scattered bones and partial skeletons of animals all about the place as if he had wandered into some sacred burial ground.

As he is standing outside the house—he dare not go in, he hears the voice of his grandmother. She had died sometime prior. Then there were other voices. They were calling to him, calling for his life, his skin, his blood, and even for his spirit and soul. He knew them to be the voices of the lost, those who could change from man to beast. He ran back to his truck convinced he was being pursued every step of the way.

Right after that and for some time to come, he would find possessions of his, even if they were brand new and unused, broken, inoperable, torn, missing, or even, as was the case with some of the family's animals, dead. It even got to the point where he wouldn't let his dog stay outside at night. To show me that he wasn't lying—and he made me promise I wouldn't tell my mother, he pulled up his shirt and showed me these really deep and ugly scars along his back. He told me they were made by the claws of the Skinwalker that chased him back to his truck.

His only warning to me was to never look a Skinwalker in the eye. If you do, it will never forget you and mark you for life. It will have your soul.

My grandfather passed away recently. At his ceremony, my Uncle Yazzie, laughing in a way that was kind of uncomfortable, joked that he always thought Grandpa Robert was a Skinwalker himself.

NAKED RUNNER

Skinwalker encounters often take the form of a naked individual running at great speeds along an open highway and are limited to an isolated car, the passengers of which witness the naked runner for but a brief period before the Skinwalker then runs off into the dark desert. At times, the Skinwalker will play with the occupants of the car—most often when it is but a single occupant—by grabbing on to the door handle and running along at whatever speed the car is driving. In most cases, the driver will describe a canine-like creature, dog-faced and with similar limbs, only upright and with attributes human enough to be disturbing. At some point the creature quits the game and veers off, but always leaving the driver with the impression that the Skinwalker was well aware of its effect on the driver or occupants.

I am a retiree, somewhat rational, but left wondering after seeing something or someone one night while driving in the desert on the road to Ajo in southwest Arizona. My friends and I routinely take the trip down to

Puerto Penasco, located in Sonora, Mexico, every year to fish and enjoy the Sea of Cortez, between mainland Mexico and the peninsula of Baja. To avoid the heat we leave the San Luis Valley, here in Colorado, late in the afternoon, getting on to the road to Ajo usually a few hours after midnight. This particular night I am driving a rental car while everyone else is sleeping. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I pass this naked man running in the lane in the opposite direction we are going. He is barefoot and moving really fast! I look in the rearview mirror as I hit the brakes to see if he needs help. I watch as he veers off of the road and out into the desert. Just like that, he's out of sight. As I continue driving I keep an eye out for a disabled car or someone or some other sign of distress. But I see nothing, and it really bothers me. The following year in the same area about the same time of the night I am sleeping in the backseat of the car with one of my friends driving. I wake up briefly for no reason in particular and look out the car window. I see a very large dog-like creature sitting off the shoulder of the highway. I shake my head and rub my eyes and then take another look. We're moving pretty fast, but I'm certain the thing is wearing a pair of tattered pants and a flannel-like shirt, the sleeves cut off just below the elbows, frayed at the bottom, and completely unbuttoned. It never moves. I tried to get my friend to stop and back up so that I could get a better look, but he isn't agreeable to driving backwards along the shoulder of the road. So I never did get a better look—but I know what I saw on both occasions.

THE SKINWALKER'S IDENTITY

Skinwalker lore is often associated with Little People, known to some as Mikumwess or Oonahgemessuk. It is believed that they were here before man. Even to this day, they live as a race apart in the canyons or deserts and in subterranean dwellings. These dwellings are recognized by the termite-like hills which rise up above them and serve as a sort of chimney. Some describe these people as almost orangutan-like, with short, squat bodies, and long arms that hang to the ground. Others describe them as much smaller, almost mouse-like in size. Either way, they are an ancient race which prefers to live apart; it is considered both bad luck and potentially dangerous to disturb them.

This strange encounter takes place in the fall in Chinle, a popular

location for Skinwalker encounters. I am at my mother's home, back from college between semesters. It is about three in the morning. I wake up out of the blue with a very strange feeling. There's this foreboding presence, as if I'm being watched. I lay there quietly within my bedroll on the floor of my younger brother's room listening to the dark for any indication of a tangible presence. My brother is asleep up on the bed.

Not wanting to wake the whole house, I say in a voice barely above a whisper to whoever or whatever is out there that I am unafraid and prepared to face them. Getting up off the floor, I make my way over to the window, hoping there is nothing out there to be found. Beyond the window and across the lane, tree lined and narrow, is a street light, its glow pale. To the far side and at the edge of the light's halo, I see what looks like a very large dog, but not any breed that size with which I am familiar. It is circling back and forth and, seemingly, taking care to stay out of the light. Although I can't see its eyes, I am certain it is staring at me as if daring me to come out and confront it.

Looking back over my shoulder to make sure my brother hasn't been awakened, I pitch my voice barely above a whisper and firm, saying, "There's nothing here for you. This house is blessed by love and good medicine. I am not afraid of you and you can do us no harm. You have no power over me. Be gone!"

I have no doubt that it hears me. It stops circling and stands still lurking there just outside the halo of light. I can feel its eyes on me as if it is trying to look into my thoughts or into my heart. It is a palpable struggle which for a moment I think I cannot win. Just then I hear a sharp yelp, like a dog that has been kicked or stepped on, but decidedly darker and less natural. My gaze is pulled away to the side yard where the light from the street barely reaches. There I see what look to be two of the little people, a race we Navajo believe to life in subterranean burrows out in the canyons. No sooner do I catch sight of them, the one scampers away towards the back of the house. The second, however, lingers crouched and sitting back on its heels. I have no doubt it is a minion of the canine-like entity concealing itself in the shadows across the street. It seems as if it wants to approach the house, but as I am standing there in the window and showing no fear, it is unsure. Holding my ground, I again repeat, "You have no power here, go back and tell your master that he can do my family and me no harm. Tell him I know who he is." Then it too up and disappears into the darkness to the back of the house.

When I look back towards the street light, I can feel the dark presence has already departed. There is no sign of the dark one.

I go back to my bed roll, my brother not having stirred an inch the whole time, and say a prayer, asking the Holy People to watch over my family and to grant us protection from evil design. I then lay there for some time unable to fall asleep certain that I know who this Skinwalker is in his true form, who he is as a man, and obvious to the fact that he too knows that I know.

TWO ENCOUNTERS IN WINDOW ROCK

Skinwalkers do not show themselves randomly and without reason. The appearance of a Skinwalker suggests some connection to the person or persons who claim to have seen one. Most often, that individual is perceived to have wronged the Skinwalker in some way, or may be family of someone who is so perceived. Skinwalkers may also seek to victimize an otherwise 'innocent' member of its own family for reasons of its own.

I've had only two encounters with a Skinwalker, both at our house in Window Rock, Arizona. We are Navajo. The first one occurs while I am playing around with the PlayStation. My sister and her boyfriend are on the couch. The front door is wide open; there's no screen door. It is nighttime, summer and hot. I put the game down and feel compelled—I don't know why—to walk out onto the porch. At first, I don't notice anything out of the ordinary, though I do feel a bit anxious. As I turn to come back inside, out of the corner of my eye and to the far side of the yard, I see this figure, dark against dark, moving across the lawn. I then catch the smell of rotten meat. I call into the house for my sister and her boyfriend. They come out onto the porch and the three of us watch as this critter, up on two feet, strolls into the trees at the edge of the property and paying us no mind. It then disappears into the dark. Moments later, and off in the distance, we hear this chanting. It is in Navajo and it sounds if it's coming from everywhere at once. Then it just stops.

My second encounter is equally as brief. It happens about two years after the first one. I am outside in our back yard, same property. It is later in the day, but not quite night; the sun is orange in the sky and just below the tops of the trees to the west. Way out at the end of the property where we

have these bushes, and just before the woods, I see this figure. It is crouched down and looking at me. Then it just suddenly stands. It's not very tall, not even five feet. At first, I think it is a man, but from what I can tell it isn't wearing any clothes; and if it is naked, it isn't skin and bones, not like any person I have ever seen. But before I could call out or anything else, it turns and lopes off, its gait awkward, its shoulders rolling from side to side, and its arms hanging way too low.

CAMPFIRE STORY

There is some part of Skinwalker lore that contends that the Skinwalker 'feeds' off of general fear to grow stronger. This then may account for otherwise seemingly random encounters in which the Skinwalker's only motive is to frighten, making an effort to get at its victims, but stopping short of actually doing so. In this way, the fear demonstrated by the so-called victims is heightened and maintained over a longer period of time, after which, the Skinwalker, satisfied, simply vanishes, the victims left shaken but otherwise physically unharmed.

I have always been of the opinion that the Skinwalker stories I hear are pure fantasy, but after what happened to two friends and me I'm sure there are those that are true. Our encounter occurs when we are out camping, my two girlfriends, Mindy and Lisa, and me. It is something we do quite often. We are sitting around a campfire out in front of our one tent. It is well after dark. We are involved in some girl talk, boys and stuff like that. All of a sudden we hear some crunching back in the trees from behind where Mindy is sitting. It sounds like something is padding around. Lisa jumps up, looks around like she is going to wet herself, and says she wants to leave, right then and there. She's like that, gets scared real easy.

So to make her happy, the three of us agree to go back to the car for a while, give whatever woodland creature is nosing about time to waddle off. No sooner do we close the doors, something bounds out of the dark and right up on top of the car. It's a small four-door SUV. We are screaming and fumbling about trying to get all the doors locked. Mindy is losing her mind, screaming and crying for me to get us out of there. I turn the key and put the car in gear, and as I do this wild looking man jumps off the top of the car and lands just beyond the front door on the passenger side. He is half-naked

wearing only a pair of pants, his chest and shoulders covered in patches of thin dark hair, and the hair on his head long and tangled. He comes over to the door—Lisa is in the front seat next to me—and tries to get it open, pulling on the handle.

With all three of us screaming and crying, I step down on the gas pedal as hard as I can. The tires spin on the loose soil and the back of the car fish-tails. All the while this dirty, mangy and half-naked Indian-looking guy is pulling on the door handle, and not saying a word or making a sound. Finally the tires catch and we take off.

We make it off down this dirt path, scared and breathing real heavy, when Lisa notices this dog come running out of the trees and straight towards us. Only it is no dog. It is this really weird looking coyote. It is on us in seconds, loping alongside the car even though I am going like thirty miles per hour. A couple of times it darts in towards the car leaping in stride to the height of the window and looking in at Lisa. Lisa hollers something I can't make out, but I get the message.

I step on the accelerator, going as fast as I dare, the road not really made for driving a fake SUV at high speeds. I pull the car around this sharp curve and then back again the other way. The coyote stays with us without missing a beat. Then just like that it disappears. I mean it didn't stop running or suddenly turn and run off into the woods. It is just gone.

It takes a moment for the three of us to realize it isn't there any longer. We are all scared out of our minds and crying, but I keep driving. All we want to do is get out of there and back to the main road. Then without warning, the coyote is back in front of us. Before I can react, it leaps up onto the hood of the car and slides right into the windshield. It goes up and over the top of the car, the windshield shattering and throwing glass all over the front seat and into our laps. It all happens so fast. How none of us gets glass in our eyes or all cut up, I'll never know.

Panicked, I slam on the brakes and the car slides across the dirt path, coming to a full stop just before some trees. Mindy, for some reason, once we stop, opens the back door and bolts, running off into the woods and out of sight. Lisa climbs over the front seat, flops over into the back seat, and slams the door shut, locking it—which you have to admit is kind of silly since we have no windshield. But the coyote is gone and so is Mindy. I get the car back on the road and drive slowly along, my window partially open, and call out for Mindy. There is no answer. Not knowing what else to do, we pull

over and spend the night there in the car. Neither one of us gets any sleep.

First thing in the morning, we go out to look for Mindy, going into the woods where we saw her run off. We find her not too far off huddled up next to a tree and trembling. She is bloodied with scratch marks all over her arms and some on her face, though none of them all that deep or serious. She has no idea what happened to her. Worried, we take her straight home, leaving our tent where it is pitched. Needless to say, we never went camping there again.

THE WHISTLE

Native Americans living on the reservations throughout the Great Basin and Four Corners area often keep dogs. While dogs are a common pet all over the States and by all sorts of people, they are especially valued for their ability to sense the unnatural well before their owners can. Their barks then alert as to the presence of a possible Skinwalker allowing for proactive measures to be taken before it can draw too near to the house or Hogan.

My mother is visiting my brother's family just east of Reno, Nevada. My brother and his wife have a night out and mom's watching over the kids who are three and five years old at the time. She has just gotten them off to bed and goes into the living room to watch her programs. She nods off in front of the television and is awaken around 11:30, she says. She hears whistling—not the bored, absent-minded kind, but by someone who is really talented at it. She finds it strange that someone would be outside at this time of night, not only whistling but seemingly close to the house. She goes over to the picture window. The moon is full and bright, the reflection casting a pale glow upon the rooftops of the nearby houses there on the reservation. Suddenly, dogs from the neighbors all start barking at once. They sound scared and as if they are barking a warning. Despite the noise, she now hears a different whistle, the kind the police use, or sports officials. It is coming from there by the road which runs along the side of the house. She puts on her robe and goes out to the porch and around to that side of the house. There in the road is this guy who when he notices her standing there says he's the local medicine man. He holds up his whistle like it's some kind of badge. He then tells her there is a Skinwalker running through the neighborhood and that she should go back inside and lock the door. My brother finds out the

next day from the neighbors that there was a critter of some sort jumping from one roof to the next.

WHITE MAN'S ENCOUNTER

The folklore of the Skinwalker does not apply to any race other than Native Americans. It is not that a Skinwalker cannot harm a white man or black man, for example, but that it would have no reason to. Skinwalkers are selfish beings that act out against family members and tribal members who are perceived as having done the Skinwalker wrong or harm, or towards whom the Skinwalker has a reason for jealousy or envy. It is not until much later in the history of the Diné that the Skinwalker's powers were broadened, and then only to take vengeance against whites (settlers) who wronged the tribe as a whole. In all likelihood, these Skinwalkers were men from the tribe dressed in animal pelts, but otherwise very much human.

I am not an Indian, but I have a Skinwalker story. I go along with a friend to check on his grandfather's Hogan; his grandfather is in the hospital for a spell—he had some kind of accident there on the property. We get to the place and we're hanging out for a while, drinking some beers and sharing a blunt. My friend suddenly goes real still and puts his finger up to his lips like he wants me to be quiet. I hear this shuffling noise coming from just outside. My friend, who is Hopi, has dark skin. Suddenly, though, his face turn several shades paler. The shuffling becomes louder as if someone is coming towards the door. My friend grabs a piece of burning firewood out of the stove, goes over towards the door, and hurls it out in front of the Hogan. We hear it hit the ground with a thunk. Immediately, there is this high-pitched haughty laughter, something like the wicked witch of the west. Every hair on my body stands up. My friend starts yelling out in some Native language and screaming obscenities in English. All I can do is pull out my pocket knife and hold it up in the ready. The person outside just keeps laughing. I finally get the cojones to move over towards the door and peek out. My heart nearly jumps out of my chest. Only several feet from me is this Skinwalker. It is leaning up against the wall just to the right, thin and scraggly, covered with these mangy animal skins—and staring back at me with these eyes like dull black marbles. I'm convinced it is a woman. I see what look to be breasts beneath the skins, but thin and sagging, like she's really old. Her face is

covered with splotches of hair, and I can’t tell if it’s real or some kind of get-up. It is pretty dark. I let out a bit of scream—though I hate to admit it, and it just turns and jogs off towards these hills to the other side of the Hogan. That’s the only time I have seen a Skinwalker since and I hope to never see one again.

A SCORE TO SETTLE

Here is a Navajo story from Black Mesa.

I am about 10 years old at the time of this encounter. My family is living with my grandparents in Inscription House, Arizona. It is me, my mom, dad, and little brother. That night we get a knock on our door. It is around 8:00 pm. It is the local sheriff. He says that my father’s mom and his brother, my uncle, were in a bad car accident. My mom and dad run out the door and leave me and my little brother with my other grandma. My grandfather is away in Kingman.

My little brother and I have trouble falling asleep, so my grandma lights the kerosene lamp and just sits there knitting and singing songs in Navajo. All of a sudden we hear the hounds start braying, and in the distance, what sounds like a flute being played. I remember thinking nothing of it and resume playing with my cars there beside my brother. I would say it is around 10:30 pm by that time.

As we’re sitting there playing, the hounds sound like they are getting closer, their barking louder and more urgent. My grandma doesn’t seemed bothered, but my little brother and I are pretty shaken-up. The hounds keep at it pretty steadily for a good hour or so and then stop. A little after midnight, as my brother and I are asleep, there is a knock on the front door. I wake up thinking it is my parents. I jump up and run to the door. But just before I reach it, my grandma yells for me to get away. I freeze in my tracks. She never raises her voice without a reason. She then yells at the door in Navajo, “Who’s there?" There is no answer. She yells again. This time the knock on the door is louder and more impatient. My grandma sits back down on her chair and says firmly, but calmly, "Go away. We don’t want you here. Leave us alone." Whoever it is starts to pound on the door. I run back to my grandmother, and by this time my little brother is up too.

Suddenly, the hounds start to bark again, louder than ever. The knocking stops and is replaced by a thumping upon the roof as if someone is

walking across the top of the house. Then there is a loud thump as if something heavy hits the porch. There outside the window, which is covered by a thin-white curtain, rises up a dark figure. But it doesn't have the form of a man. It is like a large animal walking on two feet. It starts to push on the window pane. I think for sure it is going to break. But it stops and moves away. Seconds later the doorknob to the front door is turning back and forth, the thing outside pushing and pulling as if trying to open the door by force.

My little brother and I are crying, but my grandmother, as calm as ever, starts singing and praying in Navajo. Everything stops and goes silent. Moments later, light pours through the front windows of the house and we hear a car come up the drive. This time, it is my parents.

Many years later, when I was older, my other grandmother told me that a Skinwalker had a score to settle with my family and had come for my little brother and me. However, it didn't count on my mom's mother being so strong in her faith and wise in the ways of our ancestors.

To this day I still get nightmares when I hear whistling in the distance or see dark and strange forms in the trees. But when I do, I just pray and tell them to leave me be, and they go away.

HOPI RUINS

The canyons throughout the Great Basin and the Four Corners (Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico—Nevada fits in there too) are populated with signs and indications of the presence of the ancestors of the tribes native to the area. Most common are petro-graphs and petroglyphs—stone etchings and drawings, the remains of cliff dwellings and kivas, and ancient roads which seem to run to nowhere in particular. There are also man-made structures reminiscent of stone houses and temples. Most of these areas are accessible to visitors; however, they are also monitored by local and tribal authorities which protect their sanctity and ensure their preservation. That said, it is not uncommon to find contemporary graffiti and other evidence of disregard for these historic sites.

Several years ago a friend of mine, a local Hopi guide for the tourists, and I are poking around these ruins. It is already dark, but if you are going to go to these places for the reason we go—see if there's anything of value that hasn't yet been recovered, you have to go at a time you're likely not to be

seen. I have gone to other similar places with this guy and we've had some luck with small relics that tourists will buy. I am Hopi too.

We are only there for a short period when we hear something moving about in this narrow copse off towards the ridge and only a few yards from where we are. My friend takes a pistol from his waist and points it over to the trees. He's calling out in our Native language some words we both know and which are generally used to ward off dark spirits.

By the sound of things, whatever is out there is getting bolder and coming closer, but we still can't see anything. At the same time, there is this feeling of dread building up inside of me and I'm thinking too how nice it would be to have a pistol instead of the flashlight I am carrying. At this time, we're both thinking Skinwalker. It's just part of who we are as Hopi.

My friend then starts backing the two of us towards this ledge running up and over our heads. Just then this sharp yipping sound breaks out followed by this sustained high-pitched scream which slices right through me like an icy wind. I find myself praying before I realize I am doing it. My friend is chanting in Hopi, his voice filled with fear. We both have no doubt it is a Skinwalker and it is coming right at us.

I lift my flashlight and point its bright beam in the direction of that blood chilling screech. The Skinwalker still in the dark of the copse responds by making this throaty, mucous filled sound, a sort of coughing noise. I am waving the light all around trying to get a glimpse of it.

Just then, I guess my friend can't take it anymore and starts firing his pistol, the rounds tearing through the bushes and ricocheting off the stone of the ridge. I drop for cover and duck my head, saying the Hail Mary the whole time. When he stops firing, I look up in time to see this dark shape run up the sheer slope of the ridge just to the other side of the trees and brush. We didn't hang around to see where it went, leaving the ruins behind and getting back to our truck.

TRUCKER'S STORY

The Skinwalker has the power to affect the memory of its victim. Usually to do so requires either the use of the cadaver dust, direct eye contact, or, much in the same way as voodoo, possession of an item which belongs to the victim and is then used as part of a ritual or ceremony. As a result of this power or influence, a Skinwalker can obligate the victim to

perform an act or a duty which is afterwards forgotten. The Skinwalker can also make his victim see something that isn't really there or believe something that never happened.

I myself am not Navajo but my friend is. He grew up around Gallup, New Mexico. He loves to tell me stories about Skinwalkers. He knows it gives me the willies. According to him, they are not like werewolves, but are dark spirits that use the skins or even the flesh of anything living that may serve its purpose. They will also use certain animal parts as totems. For example, they will take the claws from a bear or the antlers from a deer. They are known to come after humans too, but he says that it's an Indian thing and that white people have nothing to worry about. He says the only way to make it stop bothering you is to take away its disguise.

The scariest story he tells is about this Navajo trucker that his father knows. Every night he makes the long run to the reservation from Gallup. One night when halfway there he hears a loud thud against the front passenger side of his truck. Thinking he might have hit something, he pulls off to the shoulder of the road to take a look. But he finds nothing, not even a mark or dent on the fender. So he gets back on the road and resumes driving. Only a few seconds later, he sees something in his rear view mirror towards the middle of the road and moving up on him. And it's not another vehicle. Then just as suddenly as it appears, it's gone.

Shrugging it off, he goes back to paying attention to the road. With his semi going about 60 mph, he chances to look in his mirror, and again he sees this thing chasing him and it is moving fast. Just like that it's at his driver's door and holding onto the handle and striding along. Then without warning, it turns to him with this dog-like face and dull, dark eyes and smashes in the window. The driver slams on the brakes. The cab of the truck goes into a slide, the trailer jack-knifing past him. The whole time, this creature is holding on to the door and reaching in through the broken window trying to grab at him. Somehow the truck comes to a stop blocking both lanes of the road straight across. The driver is so scared, he doesn't even notice the creature is gone and instead throws the door open and runs off into the desert.

Now he must have passed out or something, because he awakes with the sun coming up and finds himself huddled by this rock formation. He's dusty, a little dirty, and missing his shirt, but is otherwise unharmed. Sitting there getting his bearings, the events of the previous night come back to him.

He gets up to his feet, dusts himself off and walks out back to the highway, not knowing what to expect with his truck. However, as he reaches the road, he sees it parked as neat as it can be there on the shoulder. When he gets up to it, he sees there's nothing wrong with the driver's door window. It's as if he imagines the whole thing. He does notice, however, a series of small scratches on the driver's door all around the handle, as if something was clawing at it. The marks were not there previously.

FIRE ON THE ROOF

Skinwalker lore provides that a Skinwalker, similar to a vampire, cannot enter the domain of a potential victim unless invited. Therefore, and keeping with its reputation as a trickster, the Skinwalker will use various deceptions to lure a desired victim from the home. Most common is the projection of voices or cries. The Skinwalker will imitate the voice of a person trusted by the intended victim, often suggesting some degree of distress, or will employ the cry of a baby or small child. Once the intended victim passes beyond the protection of the home, the Skinwalker uses its bad medicine to take over his or her will.

I grew up in Winslow, Arizona, but also lived for a period of time on the reservation near the Puerco River. My grandparents have a home in Querino, which is more to the east and not all that far from the New Mexico state line. When my mother and aunts were children they lived further west. Their house was in a wooded area and though there were neighbors, there weren't many.

When I was young, I often heard stories of Skinwalkers but never really believed until I got older and after my grandmother—a Christian woman not prone to superstition or telling lies—shared with me and my cousins an encounter that occurred when my mother and her sisters—my aunts—were still small children.

They are living at the time in a three bedroom house, full wood construction, surrounded by a small fence and with chicken wire around the front porch. One night when all the children are in bed and my grandfather is off working, she is awakened by a noise she hears outside. She gets up out of bed, and in the dark, makes her way out to the living room. It is then that she hears something up on the roof of the house. She said that she knows

immediately what it is.

Her first instinct is to go out to the front porch and curse the creature that has picked her and her family as a target. As she makes her way to the front door, she hears it walking around over her head. Then as soon as she starts to open the door to go out, she hears it jump down by the side of the porch, open the porch door, come up the steps and right up to the kitchen window only about ten feet away from where my grandmother is standing.

She says she is really scared now, but as the porch light is on, she thinks she can take a peek through the window and see what is out there. Just as she starts to pull aside the curtain, her whole body freezes as if she has no control over it whatsoever. However, she can hear just fine, and whatever it is out there on the porch starts to scratch at the kitchen window as if it is trying to get into the house.

My grandmother says she starts praying and asking God to make whatever it is, go away—and this is before she becomes a Christian. Finally, the creature gives up and leaves. Once it is gone, my grandmother is able to move again. She says she knows it was a Skinwalker. Her own mother had often shouted into the night and her father would send shotgun blasts out into the darkness whenever a Skinwalker came around their Hogan.

The next morning when my grandfather comes home from work, she tells him what happened. He takes a ladder and goes up onto the roof and discovers a bundle of dry grass and twigs placed there alongside of the chimney. He tells her the Skinwalker might have been intending to start a fire in order to lure her and the girls out of the house. Later that day one of the older men from the reservation comes by the house to smoke his pipe and smudge ash over the doorway.

Even to this day, my grandmother swears she knows who that particular Skinwalker was—although she won't say.

PAINTED FACE

Skinwalkers have flat, dull eyes when assuming the form of the animal which serves as its totem. On the other hand, when they are in their human form, their eyes take on a more feral appearance, similar to that which is associated with the wolf or coyote when reflecting the glow of the moon.

My aunt tells of an encounter which occurs in her home when she was a little girl. She recalls it takes place sometime in the 70s. She is only six or seven years of age at the time. She wakes up sometime during the night to strange noises outside her bedroom window. She knows there is something sinister out there, but instead of looking she runs out of the room and climbs into the bed of her oldest sister. She makes no effort to wake her up, closing her eyes and falling back to sleep. Sometime later she again awakens and is immediately drawn to the window there at the side of the bed where she lay. Looking back at her is a man with a painted face, eyes a flat yellow with teeth to match. Atop his head he is wearing a wolf or coyote skin complete with snout and ears. She says she is so scared that all she can think to do is pull the covers over her head and lie there as still as she possibly can. She remembers waking the next morning to her sister asking her what she is doing in her bed. She says only that she got scared and never mentioned the incident to anyone until she was much older.

OLD MAN

Skinwalker lore does not require the Skinwalker to move around only at night. However, due to their heightened senses, Skinwalkers are very much at home in the dark which provides them with a significant advantage over their intended victims. In addition, fear of recognition, which is more likely to happen in daylight, makes a preference of nocturnal activity.

This next story comes from Gallup, New Mexico. A Navajo woman, now in her late sixties, recalls a time when she is yet a little girl. She has this feeling there is someone outside their house. She runs to her father who is still in bed, the sun just starting to come up. After some coaxing on her part, he gets out of bed, puts on some shoes and goes out to the yard to check. Walking around towards the side of the house to which her bedroom is situated, he notices what appear to be coyote or dog prints there in the soil directly below her window. Oddly, though, there is a trail consisting of only one clear print and beside it a round impression which seems to sit a bit deeper. If there was a coyote outside her window, it was standing upright and upon one canine-like foot and something not canine-like. While he is making his way back into the house, something across the way catches his eye. There upon a small hill to the other side of the dirt road is a strange looking old

man, his eyes eerily refracting the early sunlight, his hair long and yellowing, and his clothes worn and bedraggled. More curiously still, he is standing there barefoot, missing the lower part of his other leg, and supporting himself with the aid of a simple cane of wood.

THE BOGEY MAN

To some degree, the Skinwalker of today is a substitute for the bogey man. Every odd person, neighborhood stranger, or inexplicable occurrence is the Skinwalker. Interestingly enough, of all the tales and stories of encounters not a single one speaks of a Skinwalker actually doing physical harm to anyone.

In Querino, Arizona, there is an older woman who lives not too far from my grandmother's house. She works in Lupton, about halfway to Gallup, New Mexico, maybe 20 minutes away from Querino.

On cold mornings she gets up before the sun to start her car and let it warm up before she makes the drive. Her house is surrounded by a dark wood fence which is about five feet tall. This one morning as she is making her way out to the car, she hears voices that seem to be chanting and giggling. She thinks they are coming from over by this low hill to the east of her house and back from the road. She walks over to the fence and takes a look, but as it is still dark and the hill is covered with trees and bushes, she doesn't see anything or anyone and the voices have stopped. She doesn't give it another thought, goes about her usual morning routine, and eventually leaves for work.

A few nights later, she is bringing in her laundry from the outside line when she hears really loud music coming from the neighbor's yard across the street. She decides to be nosy and walks over to the fence to see which one of the boys it is, thinking maybe she can ask him to lower the volume some. Just as she gets to the fence she sees a dark figure step from the trees on that low hill and make its way down towards the street. It's moving kind of funny as if it's not accustomed to its body. She screams and it starts to run really fast towards the young man playing the boom box. He must have heard her, because she says he lowers the volume. However, when she turns to see where the figure has got to, it is gone. She was certain it was yee naaldlooshii.

SHAPE SHIFTER

This story is from Fort Belknap. Two of my friends and I are by the street in front of my house hanging out and talking. I notice down the block a ways underneath the halo of the street light there's this dog. It's just sitting there, but it definitely is not one of the dogs from around the neighborhood and there's something about it that just doesn't look right to me. I turn to my friends to see what they think, and when they look to where I'm pointing, the dog is gone and out of nowhere there's this grimy looking guy, dressed in some grubby clothes, longish dirty hair, maybe in his late 20s or early thirties, and definitely in need of a shave. Funny thing though is he's walking straight towards us and getting closer but we still can't make out his eyes, almost as if he doesn't have any. Even though we were three against one, without saying a word we all just start running towards my house. Right up the porch we go, slamming the door behind us. No sooner are we inside, it's like every dog in the neighborhood is barking and whining as if they are scared. Then just like that everything gets real quiet as if somebody hit the mute button. I'm not sure how long we stayed there crouched down low and against the wall beneath the windows, but finally one of my friends elbows me in the shoulder and gestures with this head that I should take a look outside. Not wanting to look like a complete pussy, I move the curtain aside and peek out. Not seeing anything, I go and open the door. Whoever the guy was, he's gone and everything seems as it always is. Needless to say we hung out on the porch for the rest of the night.

DOG FIGHT

I grew up in Fort Duchesne. I now reside in Colorado. As a young child and as an adult, we have experienced a number of things in the Yellowstone suburbs. In seemed every spring and fall I would lay in the front room of my mother's house and hear the things that were walking around at night, catch the smell of death that touched the air, and listen to the crying of the Skinwalkers looking for each other.

One summer, we sensed something not human walking around the house. Our dog started crying, then growling. We were all scared out of our skin. Then all of a sudden the whole house shook. This Skinwalker was right

outside and fighting with our dog. It hoisted the dog in the air and threw him up against the house. He’s a tough dog, though. He was still growling. They continued to go at each other for what seemed like an hour. Then just like that, everything went dead quiet. When we again looked, the dog was just sitting there on his hindquarters licking his paw.

But being born and raised on this reservation, we as a tribe have seen a lot if things but I think it just teaches us to remember who we are and not to forget where we come from—and don't go outside after dark.

YEE NAALDLOOSHI

Yee naaldlooshii is the Navajo word for Skinwalker. The literal translation, loosely, is he who goes on all fours. One becomes yee naaldlooshii by killing a loved one or family member, or by participating in incest or necrophilia. By doing so, the participant surrenders his humanity and enters fully into the realm of darkness and evil.

I don't know if this is a yee naaldlooshii story but it’s still pretty relevant. My second youngest aunt, who now lives with her family in Queen Creek, told us this story when we were younger. At my grandmother's home in Querino there are some small hills behind the house and then a very large, dominant hill with a large water tank at the top. It can be seen from a great distance away, even at night. Local people walk up the hill all the time for exercise and kids are always riding bikes down the dirt paths. It is also the location of some weird stuff happening. Once, a drunk young man was fighting with his girlfriend and started after her with his car and ran her over up there.

My aunt and her friends were hanging out on top of the hill one night laughing and probably drinking. She and this boy who she was kind of sweet on got into a dispute and he went home. Later on, she started down the hill and half way, she saw a dark figure that she thought was this boy running back up the hill towards her. She started to call to him. However, whatever it was ran right past her, knocking her to the ground and making her cry. She went home in tears not really knowing what'd happened.

Back at the house, she showed my grandma her arm complaining that it hurt. When my grandmother rolled up the sleeve of her shirt, she discovered a patch of skin that had been blistered as if she had been burned.

Later that evening, they boy called her to apologize for the argument. She asked if it was him there on the hill. He swore to her that he had been at home since he left her up there.

She never knew what it was that injured her arm but has since suspected it could've been a Skinwalker.

SNAKE BIT

Generally, Skinwalkers take the form of wolves, coyotes, or bears. This transformation is owing perhaps to the availability of pelts and skins to the practitioner, and the fact that these skins and pelts could be tailored to fit. However, Skinwalkers were also known to transform into eagles and snakes. Those taking the form of a snake would present as a hybrid, as it were, of man and reptile, more so than the actual snake itself.

This next story comes from Snake Butte in Assiniboine (part of the Sioux Nation) country in Hays, Montana, or so there about. My grandmother says that her own grandfather—he was just a boy at the time—was asked by this old woman to go with her to Snake Butte. She has a gunny sack full of day-old puppies that she is going to do away with.

When they get to the butte—they are walking—the old woman tells her grandfather to wait by this huge boulder. She tells him he is to wait for her no matter how long it takes. She also warns him about coming to look for her, telling him that the place is full of dangerous rattlesnakes and if he gets bit he'll likely die right there.

Doing what he's told, he sits there beside the rock for what seems like to him hours, but was probably only twenty minutes. Eventually, being a young boy, he gets bored and decides there'd be no harm in taking a peek to see if the old woman is somewhere around, or had he been left out there by himself.

He goes around the boulder and walks down into the brush. Finally, he comes across the woman, her back to him. Not wanting to be seen, he ducks into some bushes. From there, he watches as the woman is feeding the puppies to a nest of rattlers. He hears her talking to them as if she's having a conversation, evening stopping to laugh as if she finds something funny. Then suddenly, as if she knows he's there the whole time, she turns to stare right where he's hiding. But it's not her face he sees, but the head of a snake.

And just like that she swallows down one of those puppies.

My grandmother says he is so frightened by what he sees, he turns and runs the nearly three miles all the way back to his house without stopping. He never went near that old lady again and she never said anything to him about it.

OLD CROW STORY

There's an old Crow story dating back to the turn of the twentieth century about a man and his daughter driving their wagon along one of the back dirt roads of the reservation. They are on their way to the market. The daughter, about ten years of age, notices an old woman up ahead. She is hobbling along the middle of the road and mumbling to herself. Just then, her father snaps the reins to the horse pulling the wagon and it breaks into a faster pace, trotting up alongside the old woman. As soon as the father is in reach, he raises his buggy whip and thrashes the woman across the back. Then and there right before the eyes of the little girl, the old woman withers down in size, turns into a porcupine, and runs off into the trees by the road side. Her father, not in the least bit surprised, turns to her and says, "Let that be a lesson to you."

THE FOX

In the late 1970s, my Aunt Janie and her husband, Jack, were driving home late one night. They were returning from a revival. As they were driving along an isolated road upon the reservation, they saw what looked like a fox run in front of the truck. My aunt said that the little animal dove into the ditch alongside the road. My uncle, who is kind of an animal lover, stopped the truck and rolled back slowly thinking maybe they had hit it. It was a moonless night.

As Aunt Janie rolled down her window, she could see the animal laying in the ditch. As she leaned out to get a closer look, she saw to her surprise a figure that was much larger. It was actually a woman covered in what appeared to be fox hair and skin, her face painted, and wearing a collection of necklaces. As she was looking, the woman suddenly raised her arm and pointed at her. My aunt screamed, and my uncle just sped off. As my aunt looked back over her shoulder, she saw the Skinwalker sit up. But as it

was very dark, she soon lost sight of it.

That next day when they were up and about—and hadn't mentioned what they saw to anybody, they heard word going around that a Skinwalker had been seen prowling about the reservation and everyone was arranging for the medicine man to come and smudge their homes.

Ye Yah!

SKIN AND BONES

Skinwalkers communicate with spirits inhabiting an alternate dimension or plane. From these spirits they obtain the ability to work spells and dark magic. Offering up to these spirits the soul of animals is often the price for their assistance. Depending upon the influence and power of the spirit, small animals such as rabbits or squirrels may be sufficient. Other more powerful spirits require larger more powerful souls.

I'm Navajo and part Mandan-Hidatsa (Dakota Natives). I live in Utah. Growing up, my family never mentioned Skinwalkers or witches to me so I knew nothing about them. My grandpa died just before the summer, so my parents sent me to live with my grandma to help her around her ranch. For company, I brought my cat along with me. He was an orange tabby.

We had only been there two weeks when my cat went missing. I figured that he would come back but he never did. I called him and looked for him but nothing. Some days later I was bringing some hay out behind the barn to the horse corral when something orange caught my eye. It was the remains of my cat.

By the looks of it, he was attacked by something, probably a coyote. They're all around here. However, when I picked it up—I used a pitchfork—I noticed immediately that there were no bones. It was just a pile of skin and fur. But I also noticed that there were small splotches of what seemed to be red, yellow and white paint. At first I thought he might have gotten into something, but the way the paint was on his fur, if you told me someone had put it there on purpose, I'm not sure you would be wrong.

Although there wasn't much left to him, I loved him and was heartbroken. So I put his remains in a wood box my grandmother had in the barn and buried him behind a hill. I marked his final resting spot with a nice stone I found. And so that everyone would know he was there, I painted his

name and the date in neat white letters and numbers.

Only a couple of nights later, I was hearing meows just outside the Hogan and something scratching at the door. My grandmother, however, doesn't have any other cats and I don’t remember seeing any hanging around the ranch. Regardless, I’d go over and open the door or at least look out, and each time there was nothing.

After a couple of nights of this, I decided come the morning to go check on my cat’s grave. When I got out to the hill, I saw that the stone was still in place and nothing looked disturbed. But something told me it wasn’t right. I went back to the barn for a shovel and came back and carefully dug up the grave. I removed the box, and before opening it up, said a little prayer. When I took off the lid, you can imagine my surprise when his fur and skin were gone and instead the box contained his bones—at least I presumed they were his.

I just couldn't believe it! I know for a fact that when I buried that box it was with fur and skin and not a bone in sight. I wish I could say that this incident was the only strangeness that I experienced while living there, but it’s not. As a result my respect for the Navajo people has grown. As for Skinwalkers—and I’m not saying I was involved with one—don’t seek them out and they won’t come looking for you.

SKINWALKER LORE

According to the elders of our tribe Skinwalkers are medicine men who have turned to the dark side. In order to do so, they have to kill their own child, sibling, or other family member directly from their bloodline. They may also force themselves upon their own children or siblings sexually. Once they have become Skinwalkers, they have the ability to transform into an animal of their choice, usually a wolf, coyote, bear, eagle or serpent. However, when transformed there is something abnormal about their form and the way they move which gives them away. When assuming this unnatural form, they are believed to have supernatural strength or abilities, such as being able to run extremely fast, jump incredibly high, and disappear into the darkness or shadows. Some elders say that the Skinwalker cannot transform unless he is wearing the skin of the animal the form of which he wishes to assume.

A Skinwalker will take every precaution not to expose themselves as

to be identified. They have powers and potions they use to blind people or affect their minds so that they are not seen or remembered. One of these is cadaver dust made from ground-up human bone. Often these powders or potions result in a sort of paralysis during which the victim has no control over his body and his mind is zombie-like. Native lore says if a Skinwalker is recognized and identified, that he will die within a matter of days if he does not take the life of the person who can identify him.

The Skinwalker's primary motive is jealousy over possessions, lot in life, and good fortune; or revenge if he feels slighted, taken advantage of, or made to appear the fool. A Skinwalker cannot be killed by traditional means, such as guns or knives, or anything found in nature. Destroying a Skinwalker can only be accomplished by traditional weapons of the Dine, such as a blessed arrowhead using traditional prayers or through ceremonies created for just that purpose.

True medicine men have the ability to identify a Skinwalker, but will not reveal who it is lest they lose the ability to counter its dark powers and spells. A practiced Skinwalker has the ability to present as the sweetest person in the world while at the same time witching his chosen victim. Some of the most powerful Skinwalkers are Hopi.

BAD MEDICINE

In some Skinwalker encounters, the people involved relate disruption in power, typically a vehicle which stalls and won't start, or that starts but won't go into gear. While these types of incidents are often associated with UFOs and aliens and attributed to their advanced technology, there is no rational explanation for a Skinwalker to have a similar effect.

This story comes out of Arizona. Three siblings are returning home to the reservation for a weekend visit with their parents. Their trip is taking them from Phoenix to the family home in Low Mountain in Pinon. It is a trip of about five hours. They leave fairly late in the evening. As they approach Keams Canyon Highway they turn onto a dirt road leading straight to Low Mountain. Just before they reach the dirt road they notice an old lady bent from age and walking with a cane on the side of the highway. It is about two o'clock in the morning. She has a scarf over her head and a long black jacket beneath which she is wearing a green dress. Their only thought is that it's a

late hour for walking along an isolated highway pretty much in the middle of nowhere. The reservation is really dark at night and there is hardly anyone driving on the roads.

After they pass the old woman, they make the turn onto the dirt road. A mile later they notice the same old lady bent and walking with her cane there on the side of the dirt road. Spooked by the incident and finding no explanation that would provide for the woman's presence—they had been passed by no other vehicle since turning onto the back road, the older brother, who is driving, steps on the gas and puts distance between them and the roadside specter. Together the three recite some words to protect them from any dark medicine.

Eventually they reach the highway that leads to Chinle. As they come to the first overpass, they see that same old lady sitting on the shoulder pavement with her head down and waving the cane in the air. Before they can pass her by, the car stalls out and they are required to roll to a stop a short distance past the woman. Frantically, the older brother attempts to get the car started, but there's no response.

At this point, with all three panicking, the old lady stands up facing the opposite way so they can't see her face and walks across to the other side of the road. Once there, she turns her head for but a moment and they see that her face is painted black. She keeps walking and eventually disappears in the distance. Now out of sight, the brother again turns the key in the ignition and the car starts.

They make it to their parents' home with no further encounters. When they tell their parents about the experience, their fathers tells them of an old Navajo couple with a house back in the trees somewhere between the two highways. They are rumored to practice bad medicine and bedevil people. From what he knows, the old man passed away recently and ever since the old woman has been frequently seen at night walking the highways and back roads.

A SKINWALKER LEGEND

This is a Skinwalker story handed down from generation to generation. There were these two cousins, both firstborn sons, who became Skinwalkers by drinking each other's blood. The first assumed the form of an eagle. The other transformed into a wolf. The cousin who was an eagle used

his powers for good, while he who was the wolf for mischief and evil. One night they had an argument and gathered allies to their side to do battle. The side that won would own the power of right. Finally, he who was the eagle faced off against he who was the wolf. But the wolf was too strong. Try as he might, the eagle could do him no harm. Their battle went on through the night. The eagle tired and was wounded badly by the wolf. Summoning what strength he had remaining, the eagle called upon his totem. His powers renewed, he vanquished the wolf who fled into the darkness of the shadows. To this day, these two cousins walk the surface of the Earth disguised as humans, each biding his time that he may again in his Skinwalker form confront the other.

THE BLESSING CEREMONY

Skinwalker lore provides that one of the few ways to kill a Skinwalker is to shoot it with a bullet dipped in a substance derived from the bark of a white ash tree. The ash tree has a significant role in Indian lore, with some tribes believing the first beings here on Earth were created from the bark of ash trees. The bark is also used for medicinal purposes and to drive away rattle snakes.

I was about ten or eleven years-old when I first encountered a Skinwalker. My family always has a peyote meeting on Christmas and New Year's. This happened on New Year's. The whole family was together and staying at our house for the blessing. All the kids, including me, were in the Hogan sleeping while the adults were out in the tepee praying. From what we heard later, one of the men saw something outside the tepee and alerted the chief. The chief told my uncle.

Together, my uncle, some of the men, and my older brothers armed themselves and went out into the dark to investigate. The Hogan is in this small valley within the highest elevations of the reservation in Pinon.

At this time, I'm in bed and sleeping. I jump up at the sound of a gun going off—all hunting and shooting is taboo during the blessing ceremony. It was my oldest brother's 30.06, a hunting rifle. My cousins too are waking with the commotion. When I sit up, I see my sister is there in the room with us. She is burning cedar and saying a protection prayer.

Meanwhile, the men are all outside, about a half-mile from the

Hogan, chasing and shooting at something moving through the arroyo. According to them, they shot at it more than a dozen times, and they were certain they hit it more than once. Nevertheless, it would just duck down out of sight for a moment or two, get back up, and start loping off again. My father said that he loaded his gun with bullets rubbed with white ash, and that when he started shooting with those, the creature sensed it and run out of the valley.

WIND IN THE TREES

While the prospect of encountering a Skinwalker seems to unnerve even the bravest of men, old women seem to react with little concern. It seems they simply tell the Skinwalker to go away and it leaves. If the Skinwalker lingers, the old woman adds a prayer, either Navajo or Christian, to encourage the desired outcome.

This story come from Gallup, New Mexico. Family members are inside their home and preparing for bed. All of sudden, the dogs start raising a ruckus. The men of the family, including an uncle and some nephews, go outside to investigate, concerned about coyotes getting into the henhouse. They think they see something skulking about within the trees to the back of the house. The uncle picks up a handful of rocks and throws one after another into the trees. However, they hear or see nothing further out of the unusual. They return to the house.

With everything seemingly normal—the night is quiet and the dogs have stopped barking, they decide it’s safe to go into bed. Just then they hear a loud rustle from the trees, limbs whipping and branches snapping. They rush back out to the yard, hear this high-pitched yip which seems but feet from where they stand, and then just like that all is quiet again. For thirty minutes or so they stand guard, but not even the wind is stirring.

The next morning they go back outside and see that the gate to the henhouse as well as its door are wide open. All of the birds are gone. Hoping they were but milling about, the men search the yard, and out by the outhouse they discover, instead, an odd set of tracks going back and forth, as if something upon two feet was pacing between there and the trees.

Finding no sign of the chickens, they return to the area around the henhouse to look for similar tracks, knowing that only a person, or someone

similar, could have opened the gate and the door. But the only marks they find are within the pen and they all belong to chickens.

The grandmother, who is standing at the back door of the house, tells them that it was a Skinwalker. She says a prayer and together they yell in a loud voice and in Navajo, “Go away! Bother someone else!”

SKINWALKER LORE

Some ask what can be done to protect yourself from a Skinwalker. For one to get inside your house, two things have to take place. You have to invite it in—they cannot enter your house without your permission—and you have to have had interaction within them some time prior—although not while they have assumed the form of the Skinwalker. Cedar ash around the house, a prayer, and a visit to the medicine man are often required to find out the Skinwalker’s intentions. Dogs are a good thing to keep around. If something is near, they bark or yelp. Nothing will protect you from the frozen fear they cause or the stress suffered afterwards. Encounters usually happen either because of jealousy from another family/person and even hate. If you kill a Skinwalker, the person who he is also dies.

Long ago, it was believed that Skinwalkers were of good Intention, serving more as protectors or avengers. I was told this by some medicine men as a young child growing up. But it’s the bad ones that usually retain the knowledge of becoming one. Keep a sharp eye on family members with whom you may have had a disagreement, or even old friends with whom you may have had a falling out. For example, say you haven’t seen this person for a while—family or friend—and suddenly he or she comes back into your life. It may be a sign they are not who they appear and they have not come for the reason they say. Ha'go'ne

CURSE

Two weeks ago, I went back to the reservation to be with my family while a medicine man was at our house performing a ceremony to get rid of an evil presence. It appears someone had entered the house while my parents were away for a few days. Dirt from the cemetery was sprinkled throughout the house and dark symbols were etched into the cedar shake on the side of the house. One was the symbol for coyote tracks, which stands for trickster,

and the other was a snake, which means defiance. A few days later my mother was almost bitten by a rattle snake that found its way into the basket holding the laundry which she had just removed from the clothes line outside. My sister, that same day, was then thrown from her horse when it was startled by another snake which, she says, appeared as if out of nowhere. She wasn’t seriously hurt. That night, my father came out of the house to find a pair of coyotes had gotten into the sheep corral. He chased them away before they could do any damage. He says the coyotes never come so close to the house.

The prayer ceremony lasted about two hours. It didn’t do me any good. As soon as I got onto the county road, the "check engine" light came one. I was driving a rental car with less than 2,000 miles on the odometer. I ignored it and kept on driving. As I left the state back into New Mexico, a truck driving beside me blew a tire, almost swerving into me. Less than fifteen minutes later, as we were coming up to this curve in the road, a van up ahead of me and in the lane to the right lost one of the ladders it was carrying on top. It flew off and hit the pavement right in front of me. It then bounced over the hood of my car and off to the shoulder. How it didn’t come through the windshield, I’ll never know. It happened so fast, I never had the chance to move.

Later that night, my father called me. He said that he and the medicine man went out to the cemetery and dug up a spot in front of my grandmother’s headstone; she died years ago. It seems someone had buried the bones of a coyote there to put a curse on our family.

LORE

My grandfather told me the history of Skinwalkers. He says that the Navajos would select their best warriors to spy on other tribes: Apache, Hopi, Ute, and Shoshoni, among others. The warriors would provide information to decide when to raid the enemies, identify property to steal, or to learn of planned attacks to which their own tribes were to be subjected. Stealing, back then, wasn't considered a crime. It was an expected rite of passage for men and a way for people to share the wealth. In preparation for their forays, the warriors would wear face paint. Red paint would be worn across the forehead and the body. Black paint was placed from the eyes to the nose. White paint colored both the nose itself and the chin. They would then use yucca to tie

coyote pelts, the ears attached, over their heads and about their bodies. Yucca was also used to attach the mouth to the coyote ears so when the mouth moved a certain way the ears would move like a real coyote’s ears. Their arms would be bent and tied so they could walk on their elbows to look more like coyotes. The warriors would use the cover of night to conduct their spy raids.

Traditionally the skin walkers were used against other tribes. However, with the arrival of the bilagáanas (white people), our people began to use the power of the Skinwalker against each other. Jealousy, corruption, and confusion caused Navajos to attack other Navajos.

My grandpa experienced it himself. When he was around ten years old, he was alone in the Hogan with his six younger siblings. It was late at night when they heard someone walking around the Hogan. It started off quietly, then the steps grew louder and louder until it went dead silent. My grandpa was scared but hid it from his brothers and sisters. They sat in the middle of the Hogan huddled together, scared to make a noise fearing they would be heard. Shortly thereafter, they again hear footsteps. They are slowly approaching the door. Suddenly, they hear a thud on top of the Hogan. The creature was walking on top of the Hogan towards the middle to the stove pipe. My grandpa ran to get the bow and arrow hanging on top of the door way and headed for the stove. He opened the hatch and looked up. He saw a man with his face painted, wearing a coyote skin and arms tied with yucca. He was taught by his father how to recognize a Skinwalker and how to kill it. He then dipped the four arrows he had in ashes and started to shoot at the creature. His last arrow shot the creature on the side of his body and all they heard next was the Skinwalker falling off the roof to the floor. They didn't look outside but my grandpa knew it was dying. Instead they went to sleep huddled together.

The next afternoon his dad came back and told my grandpa one of his uncles had passed away from a wound to his side. My grandpa knows it was his uncle who was trying to attack them.

I believe there are skin walkers and ghosts and other supernatural beings but I don't mess with them. I wish more Navajo elders would share their stories and experiences because how else can the new generations protect themselves. Knowledge is power and right now the young are powerless.

The arrows were dipped in ashes because ashes drive evil spirits

away and bow and arrow is the only weapon that can truly destroy a Skinwalker. They are immune to modern weapons.

A UFO RANCH TALE (SKINWALKER RANCH)

The Uintah Basin and surrounding territories are considered by some to be the primary lair of the Skinwalker. Historically, the Navajo were driven from the territories by a combination of the white man, specifically the Mormons, and neighboring tribes, such as the Ute. During the Long Walk, which took place through Utah, the Navajo called upon the Skinwalker to protect them and take vengeance against those who worked to deprive them of their lands and home.

I live in Clearfield, Utah. It's a bit of a drive but I have made a two trips up. I have been reading about the Uintah basin for a while and I thought I should check it out since it's in my back yard. I am a pagan and I had heard a lot of people say that the area is like a hot spot for spiritual activity and some even say it's kind of a crossroads between worlds.

I'm not really new age, but I was having a hard time at home with my fiancé and work so I figured even if nothing happened it would be good to have a day for myself. Since I had never been down there I couldn't find the actual Skinwalker Ranch the first time but I found a little spot off away from everything. It seemed like a local teen party site since I found a lot of beer cans and clothes and shit up there. I hiked away from there closer to this like mountain of boulders. I sat down and just thought about stuff for a while.

At about 9:45 it was pretty dark and I had no flashlight. I figured I had wasted my time since I hadn't seen anything and I had been up there for an hour or two. So I started the walk back to my truck. It was about a half mile away. I was feeling disappointed but I was glad I took the day off still. But as I was walking I heard something move behind me. It startled me but I thought it was some mouse or rodent. There was nothing in front of me but I heard a fucked up deep growl. It freaked me out but I thought I was just hearing things or maybe a dog or something. I backed up but I was still staring at the spot I heard it so I could see what the hell it was. And as I backed up I heard it growl behind me again. And I mean right behind me. I flipped around again and didn't see anything so I freaked out bad. I am embarrassed but I was straight up crying, man.

The whole way back to the truck it kept popping up and leading me in a different direction. Almost like a sheep dog. Sometimes I would hear it running through the bushes toward me but when the sound got right next to me nothing would happen and I still could not see anything. I swung at it with a stick at one point but I didn't connect. I was walking quickly but never running. I was afraid I would fall or it would chase me harder. When I finally got to my truck I just sobbed man.

I don't know if you know much about paganism but I am a Norse pagan (Odin, Thor, etc.) and we are a lot more conservative than other pagans. Like we don't dress in black and sit in our bedrooms "summoning spirits to get back at our exes", or whatever. I haven't seen a UFO before, or a ghost, Bigfoot, loch ness monster, man in black, etc. This is really the first time I have ever had something happen to me and I couldn't explain it. Ever since it has been bugging me, because it makes no sense. If it was a monster or ghost of some kind why not just eat me or kill me. I was dead to rights. No one knew I was there, I was unarmed besides my trusty stick. And if it was trying to scare me, why scare me back to the truck I was already headed for. Have you ever heard of anything like this or am I crazy?

COINS

In another twist on vampire lore in which vampires are believed to be compulsive, Skinwalkers are often associated with coins, unable to resist the necessity to organize them according to date, for example.

I was sitting alone one night watching TV when out of the blue a hanging plant just inside the front door went to swinging big time—as if someone had ran right smack into it. I work in the oil fields and am gone a lot for days to weeks at a time.

During my absence, my wife has been woken up several times in the middle of the night to a dark figured man approaching the bed, and even leaning over her, which freaked her out big time since we have three dogs that sleep in the bedroom too. They freak out at every little sound or movement, but with this thing they just sit there dumbfounded without making a peep.

Also there are times when even after cleaning and vacuuming the house we could walk out of the room and when we walk back in there will be

change on the floor. My wife seems to think it might be the ghost of her grandma. When she was alive she had the habit of leaving change laying all around.

We live in Esquire Estates here in Vernal, Utah. It is definitely an interesting place for paranormal activity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

RYAN SKINNER began his research into the phenomena at Skinwalker Ranch in 2008. Since the events chronicled in this book, he has returned numerous times each year to Utah's Uintah Basin to conduct field investigations. While there he spends several weeks in his specially equipped RV, camping alone in the desert, trying to find answers to whatever lurks in Fort Duchesne's nearby mesas and valleys. In September of 2009, Ryan created the web domain names www.skinwalkerranch.org and www.skinwalkerranch.com; paranormal websites which promote discussions on Skinwalker Ranch related topics. The website challenges visitors to think outside of the modern-day paradigm regarding the possibility of alien life as it relates to human consciousness and multiple dimensions. On April of 2011, Ryan received his Private Pilot's License and uses it to survey other unexplored hotspots throughout the United States. In 1999, he graduated from Eastern New Mexico University with a Bachelor's Degree of Science and received a Major in Public Speaking and a Minor in Theatre. He graduated with Honors, earning the title Magna Cum Laude. This is Mr. Skinner's second book. He anticipates writing additional true stories chronicling not only his own past, present, and future adventures but those of others who have experienced the paranormal. Mr. Skinner does NOT condone trespassing on or around the Ranch.

Ryan Skinner has been featured on several nationally recognized television programs. In 2012 he was featured as a "Skinwalker Ranch Expert" on the *Jesse Ventura's Conspiracy Theory* which aired December 3rd on TrueTv. In 2013 he helped produce and was also the featured "Skinwalker Guide" for the *Joe Rogan Questions Everything* show which was televised August 21st, on the SyFy Channel. He has also headlined various radio shows, and podcasts. As a producer, entertainer, and now author; Ryan Skinner hopes to continue his search for answers for many years to come, and invites you to watch him on his paranormal journeys. Ryan currently resides in

Milton Wisconsin, where he lives with his two children, Whitney and Max.

You can view more pictures, stories and videos of his adventures and learn more about Skinwalker Ranch and the lore of the Skinwalker by visiting his website at: http://www.skinwalkerranch.com

Thank You for reading Ryan Skinner's third book related to the topic of Skinwalker Ranch and his research on the lore and phenomena associated with the location and that of the Four Corners. If you enjoyed reading this book, your positive review (click here) would be appreciated.

Ryan Skinner